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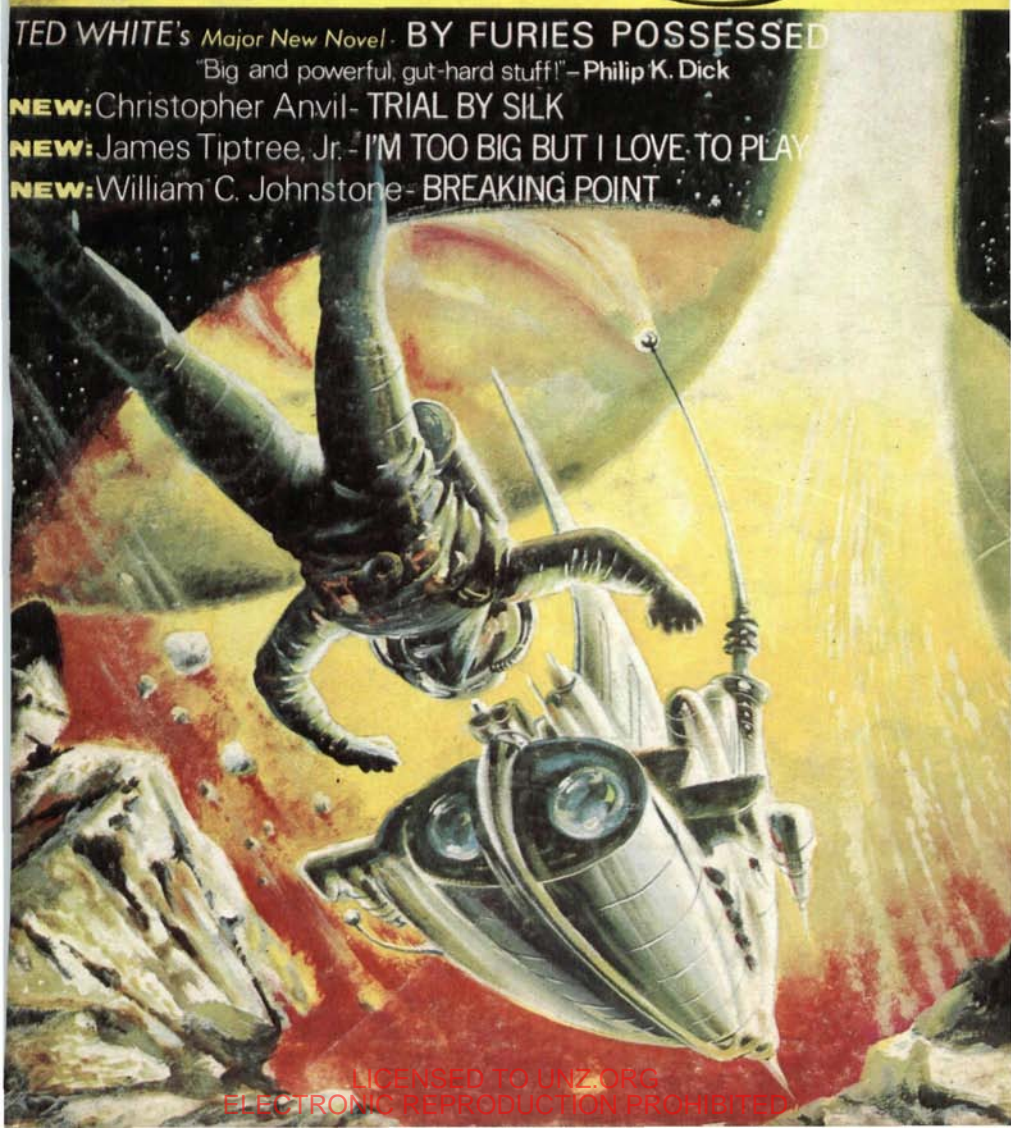
TED WHITE's Major New Novel - BY FURIES POSSESSED

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WORLD'S LEADING SCIENCE-FICTION MAGAZINE

Amazing

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MARCH, 1970

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TED WHITE: EDITORIAL

I'd like to tell you a story about a book. It's a book I wrote (which is why I know its story) and it is a book you are about to read (the first installment appears in this issue).

By Furies Possessed is my twelfth book (counting collaborations), and it follows on the heels of a string of thrillers, action-adventure books, and juveniles. It is none of those. (Although I make no apologies for those books either.) Perhaps, had I written it when I first intended to write it, the book might have turned out more in the vein of those first eleven, but the world is filled with What-Might-Have-Beens, and it did not turn out that way. Nevertheless, *By Furies Possessed* was conceived in early 1967, and grew out of a peculiar combination of circumstances.

The first was an episode of a television series I had just seen. In that program, which shall remain nameless here, the crew of a spaceship (the program's sustaining characters) land on a colonized planet to find a horrible malady has stricken the colonists: somehow they've become capable of shrugging off disease and deadly

radiations. They may even have found telepathy and Universal Brotherhood. Well, as you can imagine, the crew deserts the ship and is overcome by the dread disease, leaving the Captain a horrible problem: should he too succumb to what looks to be the best thing ever to, hit humanity, or should he fight back to preserve the sanctity of the series (which needs its spaceship crew each week)? Manfully, he resolves his dilemma in favor of the Ratings. He makes the fortuitous discovery that he can lick the alien malady by *becoming angry*. By provoking his crew into anger, he helps them throw off the deadly drug of perfect health, thus proving the necessity of anger and hostility as mainstays of our future culture and the American Way of Life. The program ends on this upbeat note. Hostility has triumphed again.

I was vastly irritated by that show. It struck me as a pernicious copout. I resolved to write a book in which I stood its thesis on its head.

Some years ago—before I had begun

writing fiction professionally; in fact—I made a remarkable discovery, and that was this:

It is not necessary to write a complete novel, investing days, weeks, even months of labor in the process, before finding a publisher for it. To be sure, the traditional method put a writer—noble man!—in a drafty garret to spend a significant fraction of his lifetime Creating His Novel, whereupon he “offered” it to a succession of publishers—sometimes waiting many months for each publisher to reach a decision, often waiting more years than the book had taken to write before selling it at last.

Many writers still adhere to this archaic pattern, but largely out of ignorance, I believe. For the alternative is simple and attractive: one writes a portion of the total work (usually the first chapter or three), appends an outline of the remainder, and offers *this* to the round of publishers. Should the work in this form never sell, one has lost only a moderate investment of time, talent and energy. Should an editor wish to suggest changes, they are far easier to deal with, since the question of scrapping pages of existing draft does not come up (and sometimes the editor has a valid point in his suggestions). Most important, once the work has been sold in this form (and a contract signed), one has good incentive to finish the book: the immediate payment of money for it on its completion, with none of those soul-defeating months wasted on finding a publisher. (Some very good books—including at least one award-winner—have spent years searching for a publisher, and have been rejected by scores before finding one.)

Many editors prefer to see outlines—in the case of established writers, they are more concerned with plot and conception than with the author’s prose, which is

understood to be of good quality. And when it comes time to go home each night from the office, a thin outline slips far more easily into the briefcase than a bulky manuscript in its typing-paper box.

As I say, I made this discovery early on. And because I do not find writing works of length a breeze—despite the speed with which I have sometimes turned them out—I made the decision, when I began to write science fiction, that I would always secure a contract from a publisher before writing a novel. This I have done, for some six years, now.

Although there are exceptions, most struggling writers begin by batting their heads against the walls of editorial indifference. *Joseph Kschnutz? Who he?* Joe’s short stories go into what is popularly termed “the slush pile,” and must fight their way out past a first reader or under-editor, before even reaching the desk of the man who reads the “professional” submissions. Joe’s novels are stacked in the corner, along with those sent in by the Sweet Old Ladies (hand-stitched down the left side, accompanied by crayoned illustrations) and the fourth-rate agents (of whom there are too many). Until he succeeds in cracking this barrier at last and selling a story, Joe must go to the end of the line with each submission.

It helps to Know Somebody, to Have Friends. That’s one nice thing about science fiction fandom: I knew most of the editors in our field before I had any idea I’d be a working professional myself. I sent them my fanzines, they sent me their letters, and we all crowded onto beds at smokey, all-night room parties during conventions, sharing the bottle of Jack Daniels or Jim Beam that was traditionally passed around. So I short-circuited some of the usual barriers, and after I began writing stuff worth publishing

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 144)

BY **FURIES POSSESSED**

by **TED WHITE**

Illustrated by **GRAY MORROW**

(First of Two Parts)

The first colonist to return from the planet Farhome was no longer quite . . . human. The question was, was he contagious?

Philip K. Dick comments, " 'By Furies Possessed' is a rousing good job of pure entertainment, masterful in construction, adroit in plot, and always with an effective, sparse style. White knows what authentic science fiction is, and he's captured—and revealed—it in this novel. The characterization is especially good. This is a big and powerful story; gut-hard stuff from start to finish." He adds, in a personal note, "I really enjoyed the novel; it was a pleasure to read."

IT WAS A routine run. We made liftoff at 03.00 hours and were down on the Moon three meals and two naps later. I always slept well in freefall.

Simmons was waiting for me when we docked, and I sensed the annoyance of several of my fellow passengers when he ushered me through the VIP corridors and past Bio-Customs with a total lack of red tape. It pulled a small smile to the corners of my lips.

"Have they docked, yet?" I asked as soon as we had the corridor to ourselves.

"The *Longhaul II* should be down in, oh, thirty minutes," Simmons said, glancing at his wrist-chronometer. It is standard Bureau issue—I had one identical to Simmons' myself—with concentric faces for Greenwich Mean, local (adjustable), and

local-A (which in this case was set for Luna Standard—I'd set mine on the ship). Simmons was one of those incredibly precise, fussy-clerk types who will refer to his watch for confirmation even if he last scanned it a minute earlier. He seemed to be one of those people who only know where they are in relationship to a fixed and immutable constant like Time. If the power-cell fell out of his unit, he'd probably have had heart failure the first time he noticed the sweep-second hand wasn't moving.

But Simmons' office was here, on the Moon. Simmons had been out to Mars once, and Ganymede once. (I know; I once looked up his file.) And my office remained on Earth. It stuck in the craw, sometimes—and sometimes when I found myself in the company of this prim-mouthed little man I really detested him.

We took a lift down to office-level, and a capsule over to his quadrant; the *Longhaul II* might be coming in within the half hour, but interstellar ships are not docked as casually as an Earth-shuttle, and we had some time to kill. Simmons felt it would best be occupied by another briefing.

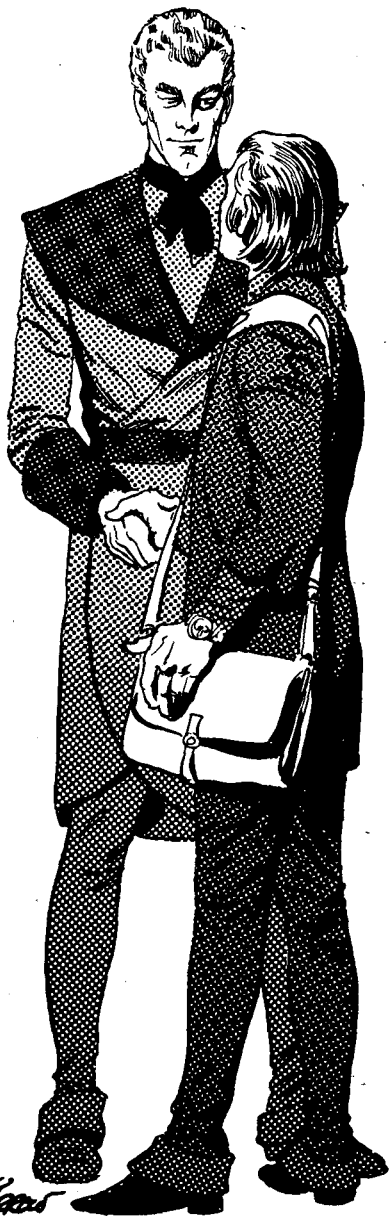
I always felt a certain measure of satisfaction when I was in Simmons' office. It measures exactly ten feet square and is seven feet high. I usually have to watch my step with the low ceilings because with Earth-normal muscles my walk is too bouncy; I don't have that slouchy walk you find in a Luney. Each time I've been in Simmons' office I've been able to endure it with equanimity for less than fifteen minutes. After that time the confined space (every wall surface littered with the oddiments of Simmons' seven-plus years there) starts working on me. It starts at my temples: a kind of inward pressure that makes me want to jerk my head around. Then the air starts feeling close. I find myself breathing through my mouth in panting gasps. Finally, I have to stand up and start pacing.

As I say, I found a certain measure of satisfaction in that office—knowing that it was the price Simmons had paid for his deep-space clearance.

"I must say, Dameron," Simmons said, looking up from his microfilm viewer, "I questioned the advisability of your assignment to this particular project."

I said nothing. My first fifteen minutes were not yet up. I leaned back on the narrow couch and crossed my legs, only lightly brushing the edge of his desk with my toe.

"However," Simmons continued, perhaps annoyed with my lack of response, "I have been assured by Geneva that you are the best man for this task. Then too, you will be escorting your subject back to Earth,



where I'm sure you are more at home."

I ran my fingers through my hair, brushing back my bangs and lightly massaging my right temple. *Score one for you, you bastard.*

"Perhaps I should go over the few facts we have with you," Simmons suggested.

"Why not?" I said, shrugging and nearly boosting myself off the couch. "I can't have gone over the entire file more than a dozen times so far. I'm sure I can benefit from your superior judgement."

He looked up, a flash of annoyance crossing his petulant face. This game was supposed to be played by *his* rules; I was stepping over the line.

The *Longhaul II* was one of seven interstellar ships built in the last forty years, and the second to make use of the Feinberg Drive, which takes us as close to the speed of light as we're ever likely to get. The *Longhaul II* was coming back from Farhome, our first colony beyond the solar system, and, more important, was the first to make the round trip since a one-way long-sleep ship left our system with the original colonists early in the last century. According to the laser-beam message sent in by the *Longhaul II*, from something then not much beyond Pluto's orbit, the ship was also returning with an emissary from Farhome, a man identified only as Bjonn. We didn't have much more than that to work with; The Bureau of Non-Terran Affairs has an impressive name, but ranks low on the world-wide pecking order. Most of the ship's message was concerned with scientific data, accumulated both from Farhome and from the trip itself. We've had the Feinberg Drive for forty years, now, but the *Longhaul II* is only the third of seven ships to make its return (although *The Rolling Stone* has been back twice, now). My Bureau was interested in Mr.

Bjonn—but most of the bureaus were more concerned with the physical details and data of a thirty-year round-trip between the stars.

Simmons let this vast fund of information out to me with exquisitely deliberate slowness, rather like a cat playing with a catnip mouse. I think he enjoyed watching me squirm in that claustrophobic den of his. He referred often to his watch, but whether to check his schedule or to ascertain the speed with which I was reacting and exhibiting my now-classic symptoms of confinement, I couldn't say. Perhaps both.

In due time, he checked his left wrist again, sighed, and rose to his feet. I remained seated, mostly in order to score points against him. I had manfully restrained myself from pacing, despite his obvious impatience for me to begin. If I leapt to my feet now, he might very well sit down again, his play a success.

Instead, he threw out a new gambit: "Well? Are you waiting for something more? We'll be late—" and turned on his heel (a remarkably casual gesture in the low gravity) for the door.

Corridors, a capsule, more corridors, and a lift for the lunar surface: we more or less retraced our earlier route. Never having had to live on the Moon, I have never tried to figure out Lunaport's elaborate system of corridors, levels, and transit systems. Most pastel-hued concrete-walled corridors look the same to me. Each intersection is dubbed with enough letters and numbers, each in its own arcane sequence, for a city the size of Megayork—but I'm told the system was created for a much larger Lunaport than has yet been built. Rather like a twenty-square-block village with 1021st Streets, and the like. Hopelessly confusing to a non-native.

Eventually, we were standing in yet another room, this one perhaps twice the size of Simmons' office, but unfurnished

and sterile in appearance. We waited among various functionaries and dignitaries while media-service men moved in and out around us with their recorders and cameras, portable laser-scanners set up in each corner of the room for hologram recordings. It seemed to take Simmons down a peg or two, waiting here among men, most of whom were more important than he; he was here as representative of a Bureau which did not rank in the upper third in clout or importance. For a few moments I actually found myself identifying and sympathizing with Simmons—but only for a few moments.

The doors in the opposite side of the room slid back, and four men, fresh from Bio-Customs, walked in.

I recognized Captain Lasher immediately—and at the same moment I felt a sort of free-fall vertigo. *He looked hardly a day older than he had when he'd left, almost thirty years ago.* It's one thing to speak knowledgeably of the Einsteinian Contractions and all that, and quite another to confront in the flesh a man who bears such obvious witness to their truths. Lasher had left our system when I was three. I had seen his pictures and holograms in the textbooks, on 3-D specials, and I'd even done a tape-report on him and the *Longhaul II* when I was in Third Form and a teenager. Hell, I'd been so space-happy in those days, I'd put pinups of Lasher and the others all over the walls of my sleep-cubical, more than once provoking my den mothers to extreme annoyance.

And here he was, back again at last, the same reddish cowlick in his eyes, the same boyish freckled grin, *live and in solid color*, as the saying goes, not aged more than a few months in all these years.

Smaller: he'd always struck me as a big man, but that was my boyish hero-worship. He was at least a head shorter than I. Tired

looking, too. The same, and yet not the same. The more I watched him—the media fighting the officials to cluster around him and his group—the more small detail changes I catalogued. But these were the details of humanity, as viewed by older, more cynical eyes than those I'd once had.

"What do you think of him?" Simmons asked in a low voice, under my ear.

"Living proof that if you want immortality, just space out," I said, absently.

"No, no," Simmons spoke chidingly. "Not *him*—your charge, the colonist!"

I really hadn't noticed him. He stood between the other three ship's officers, and there was absolutely no reason why I shouldn't have noticed him first. He stood at least a foot taller than anyone else in that group, his hair (short, brushed back, looking a little like the style antiquarians affect) was only inches from the ceiling, and a startling white-blond color. His skin was dark, either deeply tanned or naturally pigmented a burnished walnut. His eyes, which seemed to be scanning the room with light-hearted thoroughness, were the palest blue. All in all, a very electrifying sight. But I beg an excuse: Captain Lasher was a boyhood idol; Bjonn was just an alien.

I sensed it immediately, and it had nothing to do with his appearance. I've seen more outlandish-looking men in any Open City, and his clothes were so anonymous that I had to conclude (rightly, as it turned out) that they were standard ship's issue. Part of it was his eyes. Not their color, but the way they moved, the way they seemed to see, digest, correlate, and pass on—in machine-like efficiency—at the same time that they seemed to twinkle with unguessable secrets. Call it a hunch, if you will—I think of it as an intuitive assessment, and it happens to be one of my more

valuable talents—but I felt a tingle, a certain feeling that this man, this Bjonn—no first name, no second name; just one; all-encompassing, all-purpose cognomen—was not human in the same fashion that I was human, or indeed as anyone else in that room was human.

Alien: I sensed it, and I knew it. In some subtle, indefinable way, this man was alien. And it was my job to find out just precisely how, and why, he was whatever he was.

He moved easily through the flanking media—sensors, cameras, mikes all pressing against him and falling away again—and the congratulating functionaries, palms all outspread in that ageless gesture every politician learns at the cradle, Pressing Flesh—and reached me with his own hand outstretched.

The contact was electrical; I felt as if I had been given a brief static charge, the hairs at the nape of my neck bristling for a short moment. I'd thrust out my own hand automatically, and been prepared for the brief, automatic squeeze.

Instead he took my hand, enveloped it in his own, held it, and locked his eyes on mine. I found myself looking *up* at him, and my heart did something too fast and too irregular.

"You are Mr. Dameron," he said, his voice seeming to confirm the truth of this statement. The pressure of his hand around mine was firm and unrelenting. His speech was flawless and without accent—but then, he'd had some time aboard the ship to lose it if he'd had one. "You will be showing me Earth. I'm pleased."

I felt flustered. He hadn't released my hand yet, and I wanted to extricate it without further embarrassment. I felt as though every eye in the room was on us (although a later check of the records showed they weren't)—and I could feel

Simmons, virtually ignored thus far, bristling at my side like a hostile terrier.

"Tad Dameron," I acknowledged. I gestured with my free hand. "This is our local Bureau man, Phelps John Simmons."

Graciously, inevitably, as if he had planned it from the start, Bjonn released my sweating hand and reached for Simmons. "I'm very grateful," he said, and he seemed to bow as he funnelled his concentration into the short figure of my colleague. Simmons looked as though he wanted to jerk his hand away after a single touch, and I wondered if I'd shown that much anxiety myself. But Bjonn did not tarry over Simmons as he had me, but straightened and seemed to dismiss the man. I felt a sort of obscure triumph at that—as if Simmons and I had both been den-mates, competing for the attention of the local sports champion—and it wiped away for a moment my one anxiousness.

Then the media were closing in on us again, and the questions were thick and heavy: "What are your plans?"—"Will you be spending much time on Earth?"—"What are his plans?"—"Can you tell us about Farhome?"—"How long will he be here?"—the same repetitions, over and over, while sensor units were covertly pressed against us and passed over our bodies. I was grateful for the debug implanted in my chest—at least they wouldn't have all my chemical-emotional reactions down on tape—although from the perfunctory way they scanned me, I was certain they knew, or suspected, I was debugged anyway.

Simmons had to be debugged too, but it was fascinating to watch the way the big blond colonist handled their insinuating mechanical caresses. Moving without seeming to move, he somehow kept the sensors from ever quite contacting his clothing or skin. I wondered if he knew

what they were, or if he simply moved instinctively away from them. That triggered other questions I wanted to ask: What kind of a planet was Farhome? How comfortable in the confinement of Lunaport could Bjonn be? How would he react to Earth, when he got there? And more.

"That's enough, gentlemen," Simmons said, after consulting his watch. "Mr. Bjonn will be available for depth-interviews later, on Earth. Just now he is encountering us for the first time, and he must be overwhelmed"—he didn't *look* overwhelmed; he looked calm and confident—"by your attentions. I must ask you to let us pass." And, reluctantly, they did.

Simmons apparently had no plan to subject Bjonn to the tortures of his tiny office. Instead he led us into a quiet lounge adjacent to the Earth-shuttle docking facilities. I recognized it by reputation as a V-VIP lounge into which I had never before gained admission. It was, by Lunaport standards, a vast room, and its floor was broken up into several levels offset by one or two steps and thickly carpeted. It must have been my imagination, but even the air seemed cleaner, fresher.

"Mr. Dameron will be your guide and companion during your stay on Earth," he assured our guest. "The Bureau will act as your host. You may make any request." He smiled a brief and wintery smile. "We may or may not be able to fulfill all requests, but you should feel free to ask." I realized that Simmons had told what was for him a joke. I felt a sense of wonder at the good fortune involved in my presence upon such an august occasion.

"I certainly hope you will enjoy your visit with us," Simmons continued, "and I hope you'll find our Mr. Dameron an adequate guide through our no-doubt complex and mystifying civilization." (I wanted to snort

at that.)

Simmons spoke a few more platitudes, and then consulted the time again before announcing, "I believe you may now enter the shuttle for the final leg of your epic journey. May I wish you all luck and success." It was Simmons at his floweriest.

They gave me a better berth going back; it had a definitely superior menu. After checking both berth and menu out (the latter with much private pleasure), I rejoined Bjonn in the common lounge, where I instructed him on the use of his berth.

There is no privacy in a shuttle lounge, and there were many questions I wanted to ask the man but avoided, simply because of that fact. Still, we talked a bit while we awaited liftoff.

I felt ill at ease. The man had a disconcerting directness to him. I had the feeling that he was totally unpracticed in the art of smalltalk. I was unwilling to pass beyond vague generalities, here, in public, and yet he seemed determined to stare directly into my eyes and ask me the most direct questions. I answered them as best I could, but I was quite relieved when the announcement came and we had to retire to our berths for liftoff.

CHAPTER TWO

A LUNA LIFTOFF is a gentle thing, compared to the raw and jolting waste of power one experiences on Earth. There was really no reason to retiring to our berths except that of tradition. Berths are for liftoff and eating. We liftoff from the Moon. Therefore: we retire to our berths for luna liftoff. *Quod erat demonstrandum.* On this particular occasion, however, I welcomed this mindless example of bureaucratic tradition. I stepped into the berth, slid the folding door shut, inflated

the supportive restraint cushions, and relaxed. It sometimes struck me as peculiar that I could relax as easily in a tiny closet the dimensions of which only slightly exceeded those of my body, when a relatively much larger space, like Simmons' office for example, hit me with such a strong wave of claustrophobia. Perhaps it was simply the difference reflected in my attitudes: Simmons' office was intended to be moved about in, but offered little opportunity. A shuttle-berth is intended for use as a sort of womb-like bed, and as such is excellent.

After the warning bell I felt the gravitational shift that signalled the shuttle rocket was being raised into vertical launching position. Soon I was lying flat on my back, where just before I had been standing upright. We waited, and with my arms laid flat I couldn't check my chronometer, but I knew from experience that this wait would seem the longest, and be the shortest. Finally a faint vibration penetrated the inflated cushions that enveloped me. Right: engines firing: testing. We would either abort, or lift: these were the crucial moments. I've never been on a shuttle that aborted, but I know it has sometimes happened. Only important people go to the Moon—and beyond—people with whose safety no one takes chances.

The vibration ceased—or seemed to. Then I felt a gentle push against my back—still less than one G—and I knew we were lifting off. I felt a strain in my chest, found I'd been holding my breath, and released it gustily.

After indulging in my first meal—I'm afraid I sucked the tube more greedily than usual; but then, eating is one of the greatest personal, private, and sensual delights—I deflated the restraining cushions and opened my berth.

Bjonn was waiting for me, directly outside.

He seemed used to moving in free-fall; his movements had a cat-like grace and I was reminded again of the way he had moved through the crowd of media-men back on the Moon. There was something more there than simple suppleness—he had a body-awareness, a total knowledge of where every part of his body was in relation to his immediate environment. I could never imagine him being clumsy, or bumping into or against anything. Following him into the lounge again I felt stiff and awkward, and very adolescent.

Perhaps you are beginning to understand that which I did not yet comprehend about myself: that I was coming to dislike Bjonn. It was a deep-level reaction, the reaction of the pimply adolescent as he follows his heroes around: he envies, but he also hates, because every moment he spends in the company of those who are better, more skilled than he, he is reminded of his own inferiority.

But, as I say, I was not yet aware of this reaction of mine—it was to gnaw and nibble at me for a long time before surfacing.

The shutters were open and the lounge viewport offered a beautiful sight: Earth, rising over the Moon. Technically, we were still in a lunar orbit, but for me this was a senses-shattering sight, and one I treasured every trip. The Earth: jewel brilliant in its three-quarter face sunwashed brightness, all pinks and sapphire blues and snow-bright whiteness.

"This is Earth," Bjonn said to me as we hung from handholds a little behind the main cluster of passengers. His voice was breathy, and it seemed to me to be tinged with a strong emotion.

I agreed, not really wanting to talk.

"*Land of our fathers,*" he quoted. "Most beautiful."

"What does Farhome look like?" I asked.

He chuckled. "I really do not know. There was no opportunity to view it when I boarded the *Longhaul*, and none afterwards. I've been shown recordings, of course, but they are never the same, are they?" He paused, then added, "We have less water; from space the world looks browner, I think. The cloud-layer is heavier—most of our days are overcast. Whites and browns, a little blue."

"How do you feel, leaving Farhome and coming here?" I asked. "You know, when you go back your friends, family—they'll all be thirty years older."

He sighed, a curiously human sound which I hadn't expected. "True. And yet, I am the Emissary. I could not have stopped myself from coming here, even had I wished."

I wondered, even then, what he meant by that.

Mostly a shuttle-trip is routine, even a little dull, for all that it represented the sum total of my travels in space. Familiarity dulls even the finest sensations. Menus must vary. This time, however, I found myself looking at the trip through Bjonn's eyes, trying to anticipate his reactions, sensing all over again the newness, the *differences* he must be finding all around him.

All too soon, however, we were back in our berths, restraints inflated, and dropping down through Earth's atmospheric window to Hawawii-port. I found myself supping abstractedly from the meal tube, my mind still turning over and analyzing the things Bjonn had said and done in the lounge.

"Ours is a sparsely settled world, you know," he'd said. "We erected a vast landing port with radio-beacons against the day your ships would come, because we knew you'd never find us otherwise."

And, on another occasion, "Farhome has

much larger landmasses, of course. We've settled only one southern continent, and we haven't even mapped much of the planet by air. The oxygen content of our air is about the same, but the humidity much higher. It's a corrosive atmosphere, and things don't last as long as they should."

And always those very pale blue eyes staring, unwinking, into mine until my eyes would water and I'd blink and find an excuse to look away. Disconcertingly direct, and somehow everything he said carried the import of deep personal meaning. I found myself wondering what I'd do with him in the weeks to come.

The sub-orbital express took us to Eastern Long Island, of the Megayork complex, where a Bureau pod was waiting for us. We had booked Bjonn a suite above the fiftieth floor in a modest hotel in Southern Brooklyn for the duration of his stay in the eastern North Am. The swift changes in transportation and scene left him quiet but unruffled. As always, his eyes seemed to be tracking methodically, noting everything with computer-like accuracy, while a quiet smile lurked behind them.

I showed him his facilities, pointed out the infomat, the information-console, and demonstrated a few of its uses. I felt like a bellhop.

"Enough, please—enough," he said, waving his hand at me and chuckling. "I shall have enough to do just in exploring this amazing suite of rooms to occupy me for the next few weeks. Let us relax for a few moments, and enjoy the quiet amenities. Have a seat. I know you are dying to ask me many questions that the presence of others has inhibited. I will summon some food, and we can talk and eat together."

I'm afraid my reaction was entirely too obvious. I felt the blood leave my face, and my limbs went watery. I all but collapsed

into a handy chair. Well, yes, bad taste to be so demonstrative, but after all, the *shock*—

"Ah—perhaps, perhaps," I stammered, "you are, umm, not acquainted with our, umm, ways."

He had already taken the chair facing mine, and now he was leaning forward, an expression of concern tugging at his face. "Have I said something wrong?" he asked. His voice was gentle, but I could not forgive him as easily as that.

"One of man's most private—most personal—moments," I said, forcing the words out past stiff lips. "Most *private*—do you understand?" I found my breath becoming more regular again.

"I'm afraid I don't," he said.

"A decent man—a person of sensibility," I said, trying again, "does not offer to intrude upon the privacy of so personal an act."

"Please forgive me if I have offended you, Tad," he said, "but I remain unaware of the nature of my offense. I understand that its nature makes it difficult for you to speak of it, but surely you must understand that I come from another culture and that my education in your ways is far from complete." He was leaning on the edge of his chair, his voice low, intense, striving to communicate something to me—something more than appeared on the surface of his words. "How have I violated your privacy?" he asked.

I felt my stomach clench as I pushed the words out: "Food," I said. "You offered to eat with me."

A wave of sadness seemed to move over his face, and then was gone again. "The people in your society do not share food together?" Disappointment hovered in his voice.

"Never," I said. "The act of food-partaking, like its twin and consequent act, is man's most jealously guarded privacy. It

is an unbroachable intimacy. I shall say no more. It is not a subject I can or care to discuss."

"I see..." he said. His eyes had dropped. He was staring at the floor.

I stood. "I think it is best I leave you to your own devices for now," I said. "You may reach me any time you need me via informat—" I gestured at the console. It is a part of the entire vast worldwide Telex System communications network, as well as a computer-outlet for North Am IBM. "I'm sure you will find much to amuse you, and that you'll want to rest after your journey..." I was babbling, and the sound of my words embarrassed my ears. I said goodbye, and left.

In the pod on the way to my office, I wondered at the extremity of my reaction. Very well: eating *is* a private, personal thing—but a proposition to share a meal is not beyond the bounds of comprehension. Why had I felt so deeply shocked? Was it because of Bjonn's own intensity? Or was it because I sensed something that underlay his apparently innocent suggestion? Why had he seemed so disappointed in my refusal? Not surprised—not contrite for unknowingly violating a more or custom—but disappointed in me. In *me*. Why?

And later, in the lift, I wondered how he could have escaped knowledge of so basic a custom while aboard the *Longhaul II*. But that sparked other thoughts, other questions, the answers to which—if I had them at all—were still locked in my unconscious mind, awaiting their release in a 'hunch'.

"Tad—what are you doing here?"

A scent of gardenia: I knew it was Dian before I turned. She was just closing the door of her office-cubical. I paused, hand on my own door.

Dian Knight has been working out of our

office for three years now—previously she put in five years advancement in the Bureau's Tokyo office (I checked her file). In the three years I'd known her, I had invited her to social gatherings on four occasions. She refused the first three—all in that first year—and accepted the fourth, two months ago. But it had not been an unqualified success.

Dian was about five years my junior—a comfortable age-gap, I think—and, to me at least, a very attractive woman. She wore her hair conservatively, and rarely revealed more than her breasts. She had a good sense of humor—a balance against my own lack—and a generally sunny disposition. To the best of my knowledge (and that of the Bureau), she had never had a marriage contract.

"Come on inside," I said, gesturing at my office. "Let me tell you about our man from Farhome."

We settled down in comfortable chairs, and while I stared abstractedly out my window at the grey waters of the Sound, I sketched in the details of my initial encounter with Bjonn.

"He bothers you," she said, when I had concluded.

I steepled my hands and rested my chin against them. "Yes. It's not a simple cultural difference. God knows, I've encountered that before. It's something more subtle. It's—it's like those Religious Archivists. You remember them?" A man named Schobell had been digging around in the literary debris of earlier centuries, and had uncovered several works of fiction which he released—suitably edited, of course—to the world as the bible of a new, but authentically ancient of course, religion. It had to do with pre-space-age visitations by alien creatures in arcane vehicles, reincarnation, 'engrams,' and a civilization which lived, or still lives perhaps, in caves

beneath the earth's surface. He hit the media during a lull, a dull period, and provoked a wave of summer madness (in the northern hemisphere—below the equator it was winter madness; ah, well) that swept the public. Over night his churches had sprung up everywhere; he was 'auditing' people by the millions, and was boasting he'd licked 'the deros' for the first time in five hundred—or was it a thousand?—years. Like all fads that gain momentum so quickly, it played out equally quickly and dropped into obscurity within its second year. I understand Schobell retired on the fortune he made, but a few dedicated cells of his followers still persist.

One such man was at the party I'd taken Dian to, and she recalled him without further prompting. "Oh, you mean that strange, intense way of speaking he had? So sincere, and always looking you in the eyes, and like that? Don't tell me it's spread to Farhome!"

"Not likely," I said. "And Bjonn hasn't the, oh, call it the studied artificiality, of an Archivist. He's, well, *genuine*. It's not something he's learned—it's something he is." And as I spoke the words, I felt a nagging idea in the back of my mind. But I couldn't reach it.

Dian let my silence stretch and then said, "How strange. But perhaps they have some similar religion on Farhome. After all, things were very different here before they left."

"No," I said, shaking my head, but replying more to myself than Dian, "that's not it. It's in there, worrying its way around the back of my brain, but I can't touch it yet."

"It will come to you," she said confidently. "When it's ready."

I glanced at her in surprise; it was an unusually perceptive remark. "There's something else," I said. "Something I didn't

tell you yet."

"What?"

"He asked me to eat with him." I felt an icy fist clamp over my intestines as I said it, and I rose and went to the window to stare out of it.

She said nothing for a moment. I watched the safety-pane vibrate from the winds outside. Far below the incongruously white sails of a racing yacht darted over the water. Then:

"He must be ignorant of civilized customs."

"I thought so at first, myself. But then, after I left, I started to wonder. What about the time he spent aboard the *Longhaul II*?"

"Fifteen years..." she breathed.

"More like five months, for him," I said, 'but still time enough. No, I think he knew our customs well enough. I think he faked ignorance in order to gain an acceptable excuse for his blunder."

"But—why? If he knew—?"

I turned around. Dian dropped her eyes momentarily to her lap, then looked up again, her eyes meeting mine. It was disconcerting. Her face seemed a little flushed.

"I don't know," I said. "That's what I can't figure out. He really *wanted* me to—to eat with him." This time we both blushed.

Properly speaking, I should not have been in my office. I should have been with Bjonn, filling his head with wondrous tales of our marvelous land and civilization, all the while covertly noting and filing his behavior and reactions. But I had a relatively free rein with the assignment. If I chose to leave him on his own, it was my own decision to make. After all, we controlled his suite; he could do little there which was not monitored, and if he left he would be discretely watched.

Nonetheless, when the buzzer sounded

on my infomat I was not surprised. Dian stood up quickly and said, "I'll check with you later," and then was gone. I gave her a nod and punched for audio-visual.

It was Tucker. He's my boss. His office is in Old Town Chicago, in Great Lakes City, but scuttlebutt travels fast, and by now he'd probably heard from a half-dozen sources that I was in my office.

Tucker is the Old Man to me. He can't be much more than twenty years older than I am, but he has one of those midwestern faces that looks etched with weathered lines; laugh lines, worry lines, and all the rest. His face is a contour map. And since he is a practicing antiquarian, he affects steel-rimmed glasses. Naturally, he has a drawl.

"Okay, son. Want to tell me about it?" were his first words of greeting.

"Not particularly," I said. "Since when do you need progress reports?"

"Something has your wind up," he said. As I said, he cultivates Quaint Sayings.

"Ayup," I said, giving him one of his own. "But I'll handle it."

"I hope so," he said. "I suppose you know your boy is out on the streets?"

"No," I said, feeling a shock of alarm. "I thought he'd stay put. After all, he just came down from the Moon."

"Better think it through again, son."

"Is he in any kind of trouble?"

"Nope. Just rubbernecking, I gather."

"And you think I ought to be with him."

"Well, that's your job, isn't it?"

"He's a big boy. You should've seen him handling the media."

"I did."

"Oh, Yeah."

"Do as you think best, son."

"I'll get down there," I promised.

The screen blanked out. For some reason I always feel chastened after one of Old Man Tucker's little spiels.

CHAPTER THREE

I PUNCHED OUR Restricted Code into the informat, and asked for Monitor Central.

When Bjonn went through Bio-Customs on the Moon, he received the full treatment—although of course his five months or so on the *Longhaul II* served as a sort of quarantine. Once checked out, he had been given a small pellet of an extremely weak radioactive isotope. It had been surgically inserted under his skin in his back, just below his right shoulder blade. He probably didn't know it was there; they'd have been sticking things in him for half an hour or more by then. The pellet was a tattletail—it would activate automatic monitors wherever Bjonn went.

It could be argued that this was a fundamental invasion of the man's privacy. But I think I could make an equally valid case for the notion that it preserved his real privacy. As long as machines can watch, human beings will not. Monitoring a man's movements can be the dullest job in the world, and I think if I was faced with the choice, I'd rather the eyes which surveyed me in my public and private actions were mechanical, and not human and knowing. More important, Bjonn *required* watching—as much for his own protection as for anything. The first representative of man's first interstellar colony, he was an enormously important and valuable person. He required protection. In an earlier age, when fewer people clogged the cities, he would have required a phalanx of body guards, and his fame would have guaranteed him a mobbing every time he ventured out into public. He could hardly have enjoyed himself; his "freedom" would have been minimal indeed.

But this is the modern age, the Age of

Anonymity. His image had been broadcast over the entire world; and was on recall for printout at any informat. Ergo, no one really needed to "see" him in the flesh, and few indeed would even recognize him, so accustomed are we all to the anonymity of the teeming masses we move about in. Over one billion people live in Greater Megayork these days: compute the odds, if you will, of *your* likelihood of bumping into Bjonn.

Thus, the Monitor System: a way of keeping easy, automatic, unrestrictive tabs on the man. A way of letting him enjoy his freedom without danger. And a way for me to find him, now.

Shortly I had his present co-ordinants, a graph of past movements, and a projection based thereon. I keyed in a printout, tore off the sheet of plastic, and all but bolted from my office.

Dian poked her head out of her office as I rushed past. "Trouble?"

"Come along, why don't you?" I suggested. "Unless you're busy?"

In the down-lift she asked, "Why the rush?"

"Our man is out on the town," I replied.

"Oh, ho! Is that bad?"

"Yes and no. Not really—I can't imagine him unable to handle himself." I pointed at the printout still in my fist. "He's just ambling along, looking to see what there is to see."

"Around the Stiles Arms?" Dian laughed. "Not much!"

"Not if you're used to hundred-story buildings, pod-lines, park strips, and all the rest, no," I agreed. "But he isn't."

"But you don't think he's in any sort of trouble, do you?"

"No, but I can see where I might be, if something *did* happen. Ergo, I'm in a rush."

I put her in a Bureau pod, slid in beside her, and punched out the co-ordinates of

the point Bjonn had last been near.

"You haven't told me why you want me along," Dian said. The pod zipped out of the holding lane, and into the traffic stream. We were less than fifteen miles away; we'd be there in minutes.

"I'd like a woman's opinion," I said, hesitating a little.

"A woman's opinion? Of Mr. Bjonn, you mean?"

"Yes," I said, more or less thinking out loud. "You'll be my secretary—and, uhh, you wanted to meet him. First man back from Farhome, all that. You've seen a recording of him?"

"On the morning show," she said. "Live and direct—solid color, you know?" Again, the bubbly laughter in her voice that had always warned me to her.

"Think you'll have any trouble playing the awe-struck female bit?" I asked.

She gave me a lingering smile. "Now, how'd you guess?"

We found Bjonn sitting on a bench on the park-strip only five blocks from his hotel. An old man wrapped in a trundle-suit sat at the other end of the bench, feeding pigeons from a large bag. The messy birds were all around the man and the bench, and went swirling into the air when we walked up.

"Don't you know that's illegal?" I said, flashing my badge—impressive, so long as you didn't read what it said—at the old man. "Pigeons breed disease, and they create filth."

The old man looked up at me. "How's that, now?" he said. His hand dipped into the bag and he scattered bits of dried algae or something on my legs and feet. I kicked a pigeon away from my ankle.

"Leave him be, Tad," Dian said, laying a hand on my arm. "He's wired for sound—can't you see?" And then I noticed the flesh-colored bits of plastic in his ears

that were feeding him a constant diet of pop sounds in mind-numbing aural stereo. He couldn't hear a word I said.

Bjonn had been watching us in silence. Now I turned to him to introduce Dian, and he said, "Am I violating my parole?"

Dian laughed, and I put a brief smile on my lips for him. "You're not under guard," I said. "But you are unused to a city this size, I imagine."

"It stretches for miles in every direction, I'm told."

I nodded, and slipped in an introduction for Dian, 'my secretary,' who had been dying to meet him. He gave her a smile that lit his face like the sun.

"I've just been sitting out here, trying to encompass it all," Bjonn told us. We began strolling down the strip, away from the old man and his pigeons. "These monstrous buildings—" he gestured with his arm at the buildings which lined each side of the strip and then pointed at the narrow band of yellowish sky overhead—"and the sky so far above. I feel that at any moment they will all topple down upon me; I feel their enormous weight."

It was warm, out here in the open, and I wasn't dressed for it. I didn't have nose filters either, and the smell was vaguely annoying. I didn't normally spend much time out here. "I had expected you would be tired, after your long day," I said, "or I would have offered to show you around the town a bit."

"I slept on the shuttle," Bjonn said, "when we were, ahh, berthed. Very pleasant." We had spent almost all our free time in the lounge—but I didn't bring that up.

"Well, I'm tired—my day started with the shuttle flight up," I said. "Perhaps you'd enjoy seeing some of our nighttime entertainments with Dian?"

He glanced from me to Dian, his smile

deepening. "If the young lady has no objections?"

"Oh, none at all," she said. "I'd love it." Either she was a fine actress or she was giving him a better reaction than she ever had me. "I wish you'd tell me about your home—Farhome, I mean..."

I left them there, happy—I thought—to get back down to traffic level and a pod. Dian was a Level Seven Investigator—my own rank. Bjonn would be in capable hands. So—why was I annoyed?

I took a high-speed tube to Vermont. I lived in Rutland, which is still a small city by modern definitions, but has a direct tube into Megayork. My aptrooms were located on the top floor of a ten-story coop, and not only is the sun closer and the air cleaner, but I can see green mountains from my bedroom window—if it isn't polarized (which it usually is).

I stripped, took a mist in the 'fresher, and slipped into my meal chamber for the total pleasure of a complete dinner and evacuation. Then, cleansed, drained and refilled, finally at some sort of peace with the world, I went to bed. The events of the day slipped off me like an easily shed skin, and I forgot the whole troubling mess.

It was with me again when I awoke, though.

My alarm-clock, having sensed that the sun would strike me full-face and that the day was clear and not overcast, had depolarized my window. I turned over, but the back of my neck and my shoulders grew uncomfortably warm. I had my usual pre-waking dream of being trapped in a burning room.

Finally I turned over again, stared at my light-washed window, squeezed my eyes shut again, red and green after-images still dancing under my lids, and groped my way from the bed to the door, where the clock

and window control is. The light died to a blessed underwater green murk, and I peeped my eyes open again.

Standard ritual.

When are they going to invent a clock that will wake a man up painlessly?

After my morning meal and ablutions, I dressed and punched the recall button on my infomat. No messages. A nice day, according to Eastern Seaboard Weather Central; average temperature/humidity only comfort-plus-5-degrees, smog index of .25, prevailing winds from the north-east at five miles an hour with gusts to fifteen. No messages; that meant Dian had encountered no problems the night before. Well, that was good, anyway. No news is good news. Yeah.

I stared at the console for about five minutes, and then got up and went over to my storage room.

I went into my storage room about three times a year, on the average, although it had probably been six months since last I had used it.

Actually, it was intended as a second bedroom for the apt, but I had converted it into a virtual replica of the den in which I'd spent my teens. The dimensions weren't exactly the same—it was larger—but I hadn't been after a faithful copy, right down to the last nick in the wallplastic. And since my boyhood had occupied some years in both that original den and others before it, in a sense the storage room was a four-dimensional replica, spanning the years of my growth from age six—when I'd left my parents—through mid-adolescence.

The walls were papered with posters and pinups. Astronomical charts and photos covered one entire wall. A replica model of the *Star Voyager* hung from the ceiling, turning slowly in the vagrant air currents. Captain Lasher beamed a merry salute to me from the niche opposite the door.

They weren't all originals—I'd lost many of those. But those I no longer had I could still easily buy, most of them on the open market, a few from antiquarian collectors—although most of my boyhood junk was of too recent vintage to interest a collector.

I walked into the room, let the door slide shut, and I was standing again in my own past. The room was bigger—the ceiling was higher—and the scale nearly matched that of my den when I had myself seen the world as a much larger place. Entering that room was like entering my younger self. I didn't do it often.

I went over to my bunk and sat down on it. The foam was old and no longer very resilient; its lumps corresponded to my younger body, and the place where I sat now had been hollowed out long ago. I stared moodily up at the *Star Voyager*.

Her sister ship, the *Deep Space*, had set out at the same time she had, bound for the planet we even then were calling, hopefully, *Farhome*. An earlier series of unmanned probes had penetrated Farhome's system, orbited Farhome and sent back their data. They said man had a chance on that planet. The *Deep Space*, loaded with one thousand people and all the implements of necessary technology, had set out soon after the probe returned. They made it. The *Star Voyager* did not. There was, and is, no record of what happened to it. The *Eternal Hope* is still embarked on its journey, and we will not know its fate within my lifetime.

What kind of people must have volunteered for those long and dangerous journeys, so long ago? How must they have felt, entrusting themselves to a primitive cold-sleep and the protection of untested machines? They were our last pioneers, those hardy few. Selected for genetic soundness, for survival-talents, put through mazes of tests in order to prove themselves,

five hundred man and five hundred women, all young, fit, virile, ready and willing to make and populate a new home on a new world.

They didn't all survive the trip; we knew that now. (Cold-sleep has been discredited by modern science; how did those star-voyagers beat the average failure-rate of 42%?) But most of them did; enough of them did. Four of them were Bjonn's grandparents.

I looked at that great and monstrous fat globe of a starship hanging in the center of my den, felt all my old awe and wonder and worship for the men and women who had made a journey in a ship so much like it—and knew a violent, twisting pain in my gut at the thought of Bjonn, the offspring of those people.

They were the impossible ideals, born and died before my time. He was reality; the reality I had been denied.

It was at that moment that I first learned of my hatred for the man.

Perhaps I should have had myself disqualified from the project then. But, as I turned it over in my mind and looked at it from as many angles as I could then comprehend, it did not seem to me that my personal reaction to Bjonn should enter into my professional relationship with him. What was wanted was my professional opinion—not my personal like or dislike. There were two separate and distinct factors here. The first was that I was bitterly and hatefully jealous of the man—for all the things he was and could be that were forever lost to me. The second was the alien quality I had sensed in him—a quality I knew with certain awareness long before I had learned to dislike the man. It was that quality I was probing for. It made no difference whether I liked the man or hated him. And as for the way I felt about him—I was self-aware. I knew my own limitations.

I'd seen my own file, my own personality profiles. No one had ever hidden my disqualifications from me. I knew my reaction for what it was, and I could handle it—I hoped.

When I sat down at my office desk, I found a message in my infomat; Dian wanted to see me. I wondered why she didn't just pop in, as she so often had, but I rose and went down the hall to her office, knocked, and entered.

Tucker was sitting behind her desk. Dian was at the window, her back to me.

"Good morning," I said. "You both look serious. What's happened?"

"You tell him," she said, without turning.

Tucker looked up at me, and then gestured to the spare chair. "We're dealing with an unusual man," he said, all traces of his drawl gone. "I went through your prelim notes on him. You're on to something, all right. Last night he propositioned Dian."

I glanced at her. The back of her neck was red, and her shoulders were flushed.

"Not for bedtime fun?" I suggested. I had wondered if that might happen—but Dian had repulsed me, quietly, nicely, very firmly, the one time I had suggested it to her.

"No. For a meal." Tucker had not smiled.

I said something profane and emphatic, then apologized to Dian. It had been unthinkingly appropriate. Then I added, "But he knew damned well—!"

"Of course he did. We know that," Tucker said. "But he went right ahead."

"What did he say, Dian?" I asked. "I mean, did he pretend ignorance again, or—?"

"No," she said. Her voice was low and muffled. "No, he was perfectly honest about it. He told me that you—told him—"

"I don't get it," I said, shaking my head. "It makes no sense!"

"He—he said it was a customary ritual on, on Farhome. He wanted to share it with me..."

"A 'customary ritual', you say?"

"That's what he said." She sounded on the verge of tears.

"I think our problem is one of communication," Tucker said. "It's pretty obvious that not only are meals handled differently on Farhome—it's a primitive planet, after all—but that they mean something very different there as well."

"Like what?" I asked.

"Well, son," he said, the corners of his mouth twisting down with his familiar drawl, "that's a question I'm sure we'd all like answered."

Tucker stood up and left us then. "It's your baby," he said to me. "You've rung Dian in on it, and I'm not complaining, but just you remember where the responsibility lies."

"Thanks a lot," I told him, shortly after he'd closed the door behind him.

I looked back at Dian. "Why don't you come over here and sit down," I suggested, an idea starting to take shape as I said it. "It's okay—we've both gone through it now, that's all." I tried a small chuckle on for size; it was meant to sound comforting.

She turned and I saw that her eyes were glistening. She nodded and took over her chair at the desk.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I didn't think anything like this would come up, you know, or I'd—"

"I know," she said. "It's not your fault. It's not his fault, either."

"His? You mean Bjonn?"

"He wants something. Tad; I wish I knew what it was. The look he gave me—it just pinned me to the floor and made me want to bawl like a baby. He was so, so disappointed."

"Yeah," I said. "It was that way with me, too. Well, maybe not that extreme, but...Uhh, otherwise, how'd you hit it off?"

A little of the old sparkle came back to her eyes then. "Oh, we had a marvelous time! A concert at the Consenses, a live show in Old Manhattan— Everything was just grand, until we'd come back to his suite and he, he wanted to—you know. It was so much fun, being with him. He's like a newborn baby when it comes to all those dull old things we take for granted; you know. And yet, he's so much a *man*..."

"Do you want to see him again?" I asked.

"I—don't know," she said. "I told him I would, but..."

"Listen," I said. "There's something about the man that is definitely number-five, you know what I mean? Off-key. This whole emphasis on meals, on—sharing food. He knows it isn't done. He has no excuses left. And yet he's still pressing the point."

"What are you getting at?" she said. She knew what I was getting at; she just wanted me to be the first to put it into words.

"It's something we have to know," I said. "It's something we must find out. Somebody is going to have to share a meal with him."

CHAPTER FOUR

IN THE BACK of my mind an insane little line kept repeating itself like an endless loop: *Who should it be? Me? Who should it be? Me? Who—?*

"I don't think you have the right to ask that of me," Dian said.

I sighed. "No, you're right. I don't." I stood up. "I'm sorry to have involved you in this, Dian." I slid back the door.

"Wait," she said, her voice very low.

"Just a minute."

I closed the door and turned back to face her. Her head was bowed and I couldn't see her expression. I waited.

"I—I guess the man has gotten to me," she said. Well, that made two of us—each in our own way, of course. "But ... I just don't know if I could go through with something like that. I just don't know..."

"I have a suggestion," I said. "Why don't you take him out sightseeing today? You know—the hovercraft cruise, the moldy old landmarks, all the tourist stuff. All public, all in the bright light of day. Take your time, see if he brings it up again. Maybe he won't. But don't make up your mind in advance—see how you feel when he makes the proposition—if he does. How does that strike you?"

"I—don't know," she said, but she looked up at me with a small smile. "I guess that might be an idea."

I leaned over her and kneaded her bare shoulders lightly. "Remember," I said, "it's all for the good of the Bureau."

She straightened up, shrugging off my hand. "Oh, you—!" she said, but the look she gave me was that of the old, mischievous Dian.

The next several hours were spent at routine work. I called Bjonn and told him Dian would be taking him sightseeing, and then I plowed into the exhausting details we'd been furnished by Data Central on Farhome, following the debriefing of the *Longhaul II* crew and staff. It was, for the most part, dry and boring: a welter of facts and figures, tables and tabulations which constituted the scientific code for the substance of what Farhome really was.

The thing is, the *Longhaul II*, an interstellar ship designed for use only in orbit or weak gravitational fields, could land

only a shuttle-craft (a so-called life-boat, but no one has yet tested their potential for deep-space survival)—and the amount of gear that could be carried in such a small craft was minimal. So what I had to work with was largely useless: spectrographic readings of Farhome's atmosphere (no significant improvement on those brought back by the original probe), and a lot of other data on the atmospheric content, trace-elements in commonly-grown food sources, general makeup of the planet's crust, salt-content of Farhome's oceans, etc. Broad-range stuff that was no doubt of immense value in determining the nature and variety of goods to be shipped out, next trip, but little of value to me. Only one section stood out amid all this weights-and-measures data: the observations of the ship's resident shrink on the colonial society. I had that put on printout, and sat back to absorb it more fully.

The average family on Farhome had at least six children. Of the 873 original survivors of the cold-sleep, 460 were women, outnumbering the men by forty-seven. Apparently accommodations were reached in what remained an essentially monogamous society so that every woman became a mother. (None of the colonists had been contracted in marriage to any other colonist at the time they were selected.) The goal was six children, spaced over twelve years, during which the women joined the men in setting up their first townsite and developing nearby farms. (The *Deep Space*, designed with lifting surfaces for its one-way trip, had been glided in and furnished food from its stores and pre-fab hydroponic units for the early months. It stayed in production on a supplementary basis, I learned, more than twenty years thereafter.) There were nearly three thousand in the second generation, fairly

equally divided in sex. Current projections had Farhome's total human population at over eleven thousand. Of these offspring, a significant number—perhaps one in six—were the product of the ship's supplementary sperm-bank, this intended to combat genetic drift in such a small, relatively closed, community. There was talk of supplying a fresh addition to that sperm bank on the *Longhaul II*'s next trip.

But obviously, from what I'd noted, genetic drift or no genetic drift, there had already been changes worked in Farhome's colonists.

The shrink noticed them too, if less perceptively.

"It has been noted," he noted, "that the social structure of the colonists is far more fluid than might have been expected. Despite the strong need for survival skills and specialization, and for the resultant differential in status, class, etc., between agricultural workers and industrial technicians, no actual class structure has been observed.

"Particularly noticeable is the colonists' unusual willingness to communicate at length with this observer, despite the interruption thus imposed upon their tasks. One meets unfailing courtesy, unruffled tempers, and a welcome reception anywhere one goes. Fights, disputes, altercations are apparently so rare as to be remarkable. Although the colonists have evolved a political structure commensurate with their needs in such an open and unpopulated land, they have made no provision for policing their society. They have provided no courts, or other means of dealing with disputes. Crime seems unknown to them. When queried, they remark that they have little time for the trappings of an idle society. This observer found their sincerity unmistakable, but nonetheless naive, and predicts that within

the next generation—observable on the next journey to Farhome—population density will require the adoption of these institutions.”

He'd given the colonists a battery of tests, and found that to the man they ranked within the top percentiles of intelligence and personality adjustment—although he questioned the validity of the latter tests, and remarked in passing that inasmuch as a proper curve had not yet been established for the colonists as a whole, his findings were relevant only to Earth-norm.

I suppose if you're used to measuring everything around you, the only way you can relate to something new is to say, "I found different measurements." He surely didn't know what he had.

The environment of Farhome was not particularly hostile—at least within the area settled. A few native plants had been cautiously tested and found edible. A number of native animals were domesticatable. A small town—it simply can't be described as a city; it has less than a hundred dwellings, all individual and set on their own acreage—constituted the main concentration of the colonists, but outlying farms were being established, and mechanized industries had been located near close-by deposits of petroleum and ores. A typical scene, on the tapes, showed a low, sprawling dwelling in the foreground, plantings of varying hues of green surrounding it. To one side would be a garden, and beyond a backdrop of rolling hills that purpled in the distance. The sky was usually heavy with the puffy undersides of gray-gold clouds, which helped to filter out much of the local solar radiation. The whole picture looked very much like an idealization of our own less populated past, and a bit like a put-up job. Staring at it I couldn't help wondering if a man wouldn't feel a bit lost and alone in such an empty

place.

We used to think the discovery of a world like Farhome was the answer to our own over-population problems. We were wrong. A man named Leiberson did a study and a breakdown for us. At the present, the population is more or less stable at twenty-seven billion. If an interstellar ship was filled to its capacity (for life-support) with new colonists, it could not hold more than a few thousand—and it would be forced to dump them out on their new world without any luggage, any cherished possessions from their past.

Say three thousand colonists a ship; round-trip time to Farhome is roughly thirty years. Seven ships, if all were diverted to the task—which is impossible right now. Twenty-one thousand people every thirty years. Sure.

There's been some loose talk about building a vast fleet—mostly from a few demagogues after they'd heard from the *Longhaul II* that the colony on Farhome was thriving. But it costs billions to build an interstellar ship, and at the present state of the art it takes about ten years to do it. Supplies have to be ferried into orbit, an enormous expense in itself. They're building refractories on the Moon, but that's a whole separate project and one not expected to pay dividends for the next fifty years.

The way Leiberson figured it, it would cost the present population of Earth the entire life-time earnings of every living man, woman and child, to export one hundredth of their number to Farhome within this century.

Besides which: how many of us would really want to settle a desolate planet with fewer than a million neighbors stretched out over a landmass almost double Earth's? The solutions—if they are ever to be found—will have to be home-grown.

I had a buzz from Dian late in the afternoon, just as I was getting ready to go home. Her picture was blurry, but she looked radiant. "Tad? Will you meet us at Bjonn's hotel? I really want to see you."

I told her I'd meet them there, and cleared the board. I'd finished taping my prelims, and I was exhausted. I joined the changing shift (thank God I don't get on the swing shifts any more—rank hath its privileges) at the lifts, and used my priorities for a pod, picking up a few grim looks in the process. I'm inured.

Minutes later, I was pushing my way into the lobby of the Stiles Arms, and taking an uncrowded lift up to Bjonn's floor. I shook out my clothing and popped a pill for sweat odor, wishing at about that moment that I could be in my own 'fresher in my own apt.

Dian opened the door at my first knock, and at first I didn't notice the difference in her. She invited me in, her eyes sparkling, but I was too tired. I just didn't notice.

Then Bjonn said, "We're glad to see you again," and I looked up. There was a note of something—almost gleeful?—in his voice, and the "we" was subtly underscored.

Dian had moved to his side, looking pert and diminutive against his tall figure, and suddenly I understood. The "we" was no figure of speech.

Something had happened.

Dian was changed.

"It's so marvelous, Tad—so wonderful," she said. "We want to share it with you." Her eyes were focused directly on mine—why had I never before noticed the color of her eyes?—and the accents of sincerity changed her entire pattern of speech.

I saw that, and in that moment I realized in an intuitive flash that the bubbly, happy Dian I'd always known was a facade, a defense that held me—all of the world—at arms' length. And now it was gone, and here

before me stood a different Dian. She stood straighter, taller. The funny little quirky smile she used to wear, a lopsided way of smiling as she cocked her head the other way—that too was gone. Her face looked relaxed and open, in a way I'd never seen it.

And I knew, in the instant I saw and recognized these things, a fierce and violently passionate stab of jealousy. *He'd reached her.* In some strange fashion he had seduced her—he'd seduced her mind.

She was alien now, too.

"Sit down, Tad," Bjonn said. "You look troubled. Is something disturbing you?"

Yes, I wanted to scream at him—*You are, you smug bastard!*

But I just shook my head. "I'm tired," I said. "I've spent a long day at the office."

Dian laughed, a slow, warm laugh. Very musical: very relaxed. The sound of a woman satisfied.

"Poor Tad," she said. "Poor Tad." She seemed almost intoxicated.

Bjonn flashed her some sort of look and then she was contrite. "I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't mean to sound patronizing. But you'll understand."

"Easily, now," Bjonn said to her. He seemed to be cautioning her. "Not all at once."

"I guess I haven't had time to become used to it," she said. "Oh, Tad, I'm free!"

I shook my head again. "Must be a loose connection," I said. "I hear sound, but it doesn't match with the picture."

"Tad, I want you to relax, to put your day's worries from your mind. It is all so unnecessary, you know," Bjonn said. He moved to the window control, dimmed them, and left the room deep in shadow. Then he led Dian to a low couch opposite the chair I'd found to sink into. His face was highlighted by the remaining glow, his features half-lost and etched in appearance. Dian snuggled up against him like a kitten.

"Dian has told me about your assignment," he added.

That, too! "Thanks," I told her, the sarcasm rolling in heavy droplets from my voice. "I hope you didn't forget anything, leave anything out."

"You mustn't feel she has betrayed you, Tad," Bjonn said. His voice was somehow disembodied, very close, almost overpoweringly intimate. "It was in your own best interests."

"You just twisted her around your small finger, and she told you all," I suggested.

"It's in Tad's own best interests," you told her, and she just couldn't resist telling you."

"It's not that way at all, Tad," Dian said in a dreamy tone. "Not that way at all."

"What I'm about to offer you will make your assignment superfluous," Bjonn said. "She knew that."

"Forgive me if I doubt that like hell," I said.

"Why are you so tense, Tad?" Dian said. "No one is threatening you."

"No?" I shot back.

"No," Bjonn said. "You are among friends, here, Tad. The closest friends you have. Can you believe that?"

"Can you prove it?"

"Yes," he said.

"Then tell me just what the hell is going on here," I demanded. "Why the dim lights, all this, uhh, seductiveness? Just what is it you two are pulling?"

"Ted, you are being so hostile," Bjonn said. His voice was very gentle. "It is difficult to offer you a token of love when you are trying so strongly to repulse us."

"Let it all go, Tad," Dian broke in. "Let yourself go free! You don't *have* to fight all the time. Look at me—I thought I did, but now—"

"Okay, okay, enough," I said, waving my arms. "Just tell me what you want of me.

Just lay it in the line, huh?"

"We'd like to share a meal with you, Tad Dameron," Bjonn said.

"Please, Tad?" Dian added.

I got to my feet, groped for the door, and ran down the hall. In the lift I threw up, soiling my moccasins.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE BUZZ of my home informat woke me a half hour before usual. I ignored it for the customary three bursts, turned over and was half asleep again when it started up again. Which meant it was urgent, because someone had keyed in an override on the courtesy-disconnect, and wasn't content to leave a message.

I stumbled out of my bednook and thumbed the audio—I had no desire to face someone just yet. "Yeah," I muttered. "Okay, okay."

"Tad—" it was Tucker's voice, hard as grit. "I want a visual contact."

Reluctantly, I thumbed visual. "Christ, boss, I was asleep—"

"That's all right. You're awake now." He looked grim—more than I'd ever seen him.

I tried to shake the cobwebs out of my brain. My eyes kept sliding out of focus, and either the vertical hold was slipping on the informat screen, or I was. It was probably me. "Look, I'm really not functioning yet," I said, a little crankily. "It takes me time to wake up in the morning."

"Tough," he said. "I want to talk to you, and I want to talk to you *now*."

You'd think they owned a man, just because he worked for them. "Okay," I said. "You're talking."

"What happened last night?" Tucker said—less a query than a command.

"Last night," I said, trying to arrange my

brain in some sort of orderly sequence.
"Last night..."

"Come on—snap up!" Tucker said.
"Something happened last night and I want the straight story—*now!*"

"Last night..." I repeated. "It seems to me that I was sick last night. Took some pills..." To judge by the racket going on in my head not all of them had worn off yet. "It's still very fuzzy. Look, boss, can't it wait a little?"

"Dameron, you're on the spot," he said. "And I want answers from you—straight answers. No more evasions. Straighten out your head, and tell me this: *what happened to Dian last night?*"

"Dian..." I said. "She—she went over."

"She *what?*"

"Joined Bjonn. Sold out to him."

"Suppose you spell it out for me."

"Called me up, told me to meet her at his hotel. When I got there—really just early evening, you know ... I was working at the office. I was doing my prelims—"

"I *know*," he said, interrupting me in a savage voice. "I've scanned the whole lot of your prelims. Get back to the point, you poor overworked, underpaid, civil servant!"

"Uhh, yeah. Well, she was like him."

"Like who? Bjonn? How do you mean that?"

"Same thing—all the little things about him, you know? Hell, I don't know what it is; I just know when it's there and I can spot it. You know."

"Meaning, she also seemed 'alien' to you."

"Yeah, that's right."

"And you've got no idea how it happened."

"No, I didn't say that. I know how it happened."

"Would it be too much,"
Tucker suggested in buttery tones, "to share your knowledge of this subject with the man

who is your superior?"

"She shared a meal with him," I said.

Silence. Tucker stared at me for a moment, his face totally devoid of expression. He looked like solid granite.

"She ... shared ... a ... meal ... with ... him." He repeated, very slowly, very distinctly, as if I was a very stupid or very young person—or maybe both. "And just how did this come to happen? As I recall, I spoke with her only twenty-two hours ago, and she was so shocked by the idea that she couldn't even face me and talk about it. As I recall, she told me—on that very same occasion—that she never planned to see the man again. In fact, she told me flat out that even if it came as an order, she wouldn't do it. And now you are telling me she not only saw this Bjonn—she *shared a meal* with him?"

"Uhhm, that's right, sir," I said, swallowing something bitter that had risen into my throat.

"At whose suggestion?"

"Mine, sir," I said.

"You suggested it."

"Yessir."

"A fellow investigator—equal to your rank. Not even assigned to the case. But you suggested it to her. *And she went along with it?* Are you trying to tell me that?"

"Yessir."

"You're a liar."

"No sir. No."

"You're a liar, Dameron. And I'm going to pry the truth out of you if we have to pull each cell out of your brain by hand."

"Sir, you're being unreasonable—"

"Shut up. Dameron, let me tell you something. You may have been her equal in rank, but that's as far as it goes. You weren't half the person she was. Do you know that?"

"I—"

"You're a failure, Dameron. A straight-

out, pre-tested failure. It's on your charts. Do you know that?"

"I—"

"That girl had a brilliant career ahead of her—she was just starting. Just starting, Dameron, and she held your rank. You've been a Level Seven for how many years?"

"Ten—"

"For ten years, Dameron. And you're never going to go any higher. You were *never* going to go any higher. You are bottom-of-the-heap, Dameron. Strictly Earthbound. Expendable. If you washed out of your job tomorrow, you wouldn't be missed. Almost anyone in the Bureau could do your job. Do you understand that, Dameron? *Expendable*. And you put that girl out on the limb, and sawed it off! You walked her right out the fifty-story window. What did you do to her, Dameron? *How did you get her to do a filthy thing like that?* Dameron?"

"Look—why don't you ask *her*? Why're you throwing all this at *me*, fergawd's sake? If you don't believe me, why don't you check it out with her?"

"Believe me, Dameron, it would be a distinct pleasure to be able to do that one little thing. It really would. But—" Tucker leaned so close to his pickup that his features filled my screen and blurred. "She's gone, Dameron. She's not available."

"Gone?" I echoed.

"G-O-N-E—gone. Disappeared. With that Bjonn. Into thin air."

I shoot my head. "Sorry. No. That won't wash at all, sir. Bjonn had a tattletail in him. He is definitely not gone into thin air."

Tucker let out a gusty sigh. "Ah, but for the sheer omiscient wisdom of our juniors—where would we old fools be today? His tattletail was precisely monitored by Monitor Central, and I have the chart here before me." He flashed an

indecipherable chart at the screen for a moment. "It was followed from the evacuation-disposal unit in the refreshment chamber, down sixty-three stories of sewage pipe to the waste-disposal network under Fourth Avenue, thence to the Owl's Head processing Plant, and there reclaimed. I have it here now—" A huge thumb and forefinger filled the screen; they held a tiny pellet and then disappeared again—"completely sanitized, of course. Had it not been sensed and removed, it would even now be in an algae vat somewhere on Staten Island."

"Have you any further suggestions?"

"No," I said. "I don't. What do you want me to do?"

He considered me for a moment. "Well, what I want is not important right now. Report to your office. Your story will have to be checked out by truth technicians." The screen went blank.

I spent half a day wired to machines of various persuasions, and by the time it was over my arms ached from injections, and my mind was numb. Everything I'd said had been checked out—and it was all verified. I saw Tucker in the spare office he used in Megayork, when they were finished with me. He had my graphs spread out over his entire desk and half the infomat console. He ignored me for several minutes.

Finally he looked up. "Okay, Dameron, you get to keep your job this time."

"Thanks," I said. I guess some of the bitterness I was feeling leaked out.

"Don't get tight with me, fellow," Tucker said. He was treating me as if he'd never met me before, as if no bond had ever existed between us. "If you lucked out this time, it doesn't change a thing. You had a responsibility—a moral responsibility if nothing else—and you failed it. You failed it one hundred percent."

"Maybe I'd just better hand in my resignation," I said.

"Why?"

"You've made it pretty plain to me, sir. I have no future here. I'm at a dead end, and you've thrown that in my face."

"Dameron, you've been in the Bureau since when? Graduation?"

"Just about."

"This is the only job you've ever held."

"That's right."

"What do you think the odds are on finding another government job?"

"If I walk out on this one? Pretty poor, I'd imagine."

"You'd be right. So what does that leave? The so-called 'private sector'? Have you any idea how tight jobs are there? You have to be *born* to them to get in the door—that, or be so goddamned *right* for the job that they can't afford to ignore you. If you walk out of here, you'll be on Public Care tomorrow morning, and you'll remain on Public Care the rest of your life. Do you know that?"

"I guess so." I hadn't thought about it, but he was right. A private job is a joke, there are so few left—and when you turn your back on civil service, that's it.

"So—on top of everything else, you're a quitter," Tucker said. His voice lashed me with scorn.

"If you say so, sir."

He nodded, as if in confirmation of some private thought. "I see... You have just sold Dian down the river to that ... colonist, and now you want to walk out, turn your back on the whole thing, pretend it never happened."

"What are you getting at, sir?"

"Just this: Dian is *still* your responsibility. So, for that matter, is Bjonnn. Just because they've worked some sort of disappearing act doesn't let you off the hook. You're weak, Dameron. You disgust me. One setback, and you're ready and willing to call

it quits!"

"I was under the impression that I was no longer wanted here, sir," I said, stiffly.

"Nobody is talking about whether you're *wanted*, Dameron. Who said you were *ever* wanted? The first time I saw your personality profile, I wanted to see you transferred to something far, far away—like the Sahara reclamation project. You think I want some space-happy nut in my department? How many times have you put in for space duty? How many times have you requested transfer to Lunaport? And just why do you think I've been forced to deny those requests?"

"I've seen my file, sir." Yes, and the big, rubber-stamped, "*Refused—Unstable*" on every transfer form I filed. I've read the expert opinion neatly entered into the appropriate spaces by some anonymous secretary from a shrink's off-hand remark: *Borderline paranoia—childhood fixation upon space-travel, space career, tending towards adult instability. Acceptable for Earth-assignment only; clearance for Moon shuttle solely in line of above assignment.* I had daily bouts of nausea for more than a week after I read that.

"However, you have your talents. Your major talent is your ability to organize data systematically in such a way that a previously hidden fact becomes apparent. Which is to say, you make an adequate field investigator. Or so I thought, until *this* situation developed. Well, *what are you going to do about it?*"

"You're asking me to investigate their disappearance, then?"

"Hell, man," he roared, "I'm not *asking* you a thing! It's your *job*!"

"Yessir," I said, and walked out.

It's funny how you can deceive yourself. I mean, without half trying. Take me: I wanted to believe I was liked. For some

dumb reason, I wanted to think that Tucker was my Old Man—like a foster-father to me. It had made me feel the job I was doing was more valuable, somehow—because I had a specific person to please in my execution of it.

Well, strike one illusion.

Then, as I sat brooding at my desk, I began thinking about another false illusion: Dian. Why *had* she gone so willingly with Bjonn? I hadn't known the degree to which his proposition had bothered her—but it had taken relatively little on my part to persuade her to see him again. Why?

I'd assumed it was because of what he was—and I wasn't. I had come to think of the man as an irresistably romantic figure in her eyes. I had even thought—hell, I took it for granted—she would go to bed with him, even though she had refused to do so with me (and, for that matter, with anyone else that I knew of).

Backtrack a bit. When she agreed so readily to go along with me, to be my “secretary” for that first meeting, I'd put it down to eagerness on her part to meet a fascinating-looking man. It hadn't occurred to me that she had wanted to do something with *me*, to join in *my* enterprise.

And for that matter, hadn't Dian always been more friendly with me than almost anyone else in the office? How many other guys had she gone out with? (Well, maybe a few, that first year, but not many since. I would have known.)

Rethink it: could it be that Dian had steeled herself to take Bjonn sightseeing, had forced herself to join him in a meal, *solely because she knew how important it was to me?*

That was hard to accept. Probably the truth lay between the two extremes. She wanted to help me, but Bjonn didn't make it difficult...

The way she'd changed ... what had she

said? That at last she was “free”? Free, how? In what sort of way? What had I thought when I'd seen her standing there? That she had shed her old facade—her old defenses? Could that be what she'd meant?

Had she been walking through life as thoroughly frightened of it as I was?

Put that on hold. Let's try another tack.

Bjonn had flushed his tattletail. Either he'd known himself it was there, or Dian had told him. Would she have known? I couldn't be sure. I hadn't specifically told her, but she might have checked the records on him, she might just have made an educated guess—or Bjonn himself might have worked it out. That would have to be checked later.

How else could they be trailed?

Credit.

You can't use a pod, you can't board a tube, take a plane or rocket—you simply can't travel at all except by shank's mare—without your molecularly-keyed credit-card.

Bjonn had no card. Or did he? Check that out.

I consulted the infomat.

Okay, the Bureau had issued him a card as a courtesy, for his convenience as an Emissary. But he hadn't used it. Obviously, he hadn't needed to.

Ergo, Dian. They'd used hers.

I used the infomat again, requesting and receiving Credit Clearance on Dian Knight, employment #QW8490358-HG-465397A-F.

Nothing.

Oh, sure, bills for clothing, charges for transportation within the city, etc., the most recent a hovercraft pleasure cruise around the islands, yesterday afternoon. Nothing since. Not even a local pod. Nothing.

I was staring at the printout, trying to read something clever and nefarious between the lines, when Tucker stuck his

head in the door.

"I'm glad to see you working," he said. "But you're still trailing the hounds. We've found nothing on their credit—and we've made a most thorough search." The door snicked shut behind him and I regarded its blank surface for several moments. His drawl was back. Just what did *that* mean?

CHAPTER SIX

DIAN SHARED an apt with another girl in Old Manhattan. It was in an old building in the seedy east 70's, just off the park. Once a rich and fashionable area, it had resisted change longer than most of the core city, and when the rest of the original New York City was rezoned and rebuilt, the "Upper East Side" had become an island of blight, a "historical landmark," duly enshrined and preserved in all its amber glory. The pod-lines ran underground here, in old subway tunnels, and I had to walk the three blocks west on the surface of the old, original streets. Someone had put potted shrubs in the one-time traffic lanes, but refuse and debris cluttered the pedestrian-ways and when I kicked one pile of litter that barred my way, live rats scurried angrily out from under it. Sordid. I wondered why anyone as fresh and bright and attractive as Dian had ever wanted to live here.

Of course these days the area is considered to be "quaint" and it draws its percentage of young rebels. At one intersection I saw a young man spraying brightly-colored plastics from a hose attached to a portable machine. The plastics solidified on contact with the air, and he was "painting" an object of some sort—no doubt a sculpture—that took form directly in mid-air. Quaint, sure. Return to antiquarian values and all that. Recreate the

individual artwork—down with computers, all that sort of thing. He even had short hair.

I found Dian's building. Twelve stories and huddled against the ground. Stone facades showing the signs of many repairs, coated now with clear epoxies, a misguided attempt to Preserve The Past in a few of its glories. Six badly worn stone steps up to an ancient door of wrought-iron fillagree which swung inward after I'd leaned on it for several moments. An empty vestibule large enough for a one-room apt, and beyond it another set of doors, these locked.

The light came from one dingy overhead fixture, an ancient tube-type light, and I had to get within a foot of the names over the bell pushes before I could read them clearly.

Knight—Carr 12F.

I pushed the button.

"Scrawkutt!"

I jumped, feeling guilty for no good reason. The sound had come from a tiny grill under the buttons.

"Hello?" it said again.

"Hello?" I replied, feeling foolish.

"Who is it, I said?"

"Miss Carr?" I returned. "I'm Tad Dameron. I work with Miss Knight. I'd like to come up and see you a few minutes."

"Now?"

I sighed. "If I might." I had no intention of making another trip like this.

"Okay." And the inner door began an irregular buzzing sound.

I caught it before it stopped, and pushed it open. The lobby beyond was even larger than the vestibule, with stairs leading off on each side. I had visions of climbing twelve flights of stairs until I noticed a red door with a round window in it and a button-push in the jamb at its side.

Another door that swung open, and the lift chugged and wheezed as it literally crawled up past each floor. Apparently

there had once been an inner door, but it was long gone, and someone had rewired the shaft so that the elevator would work without it.

I found Miss Carr waiting for me at the end of the hall. She had a turban of some sort wrapped around her head, and a voluminous robe around her bulky figure. "Please come in," she said. "I don't want to stay out here in the hall." She sneezed. "I'm sick," she added.

I followed her into the apt. The ceilings were high, and it appeared to consist of at least three rooms, plus, of course, the eating cubical. The room we'd entered was cluttered with objects I couldn't distinguish in the dim light. The air was oppressively hot and humid.

"Have you received medical treatment?" I asked, mostly to be polite.

"Ha!" she snorted. Her face was moonlike—round and bland; she'd apparently had all her facial hair removed, including eyebrows and lashes. "They *never* know!"

I removed several articles of clothing from a chair and sat down. "I believe the Bureau has been in touch with you," I began.

"Oh! Have they *ever*! Beginning in the middle of the night!" She slapped her hand against her forehead in apparent mock anguish; the effect was only partially successful since most of her forehead was under the turban.

"The middle of the night, you say?" That seemed strange.

"Well, no later than six, this morning," she conceded.

Not long before Tucker had called me.

"And you told them—?"

"What could I tell them? She wasn't home. Far as I know, she wasn't home all night. So nu? She's of age—*she* can stay out when she wants." This was offered up to me

in the spirit of complaint.

"But she hasn't done so often?" I suggested.

"Well, no... Not that I recall."

"How long have you been rooming together?"

"Oh, must be ... let me see ... almost three years, now."

"Have you employment, Miss Carr?"

She turned a reddening face on me. "Is that any business of yours?"

"You're on Public Care, then?"

"So what if I am?"

"I'm a little surprised to see you living in a building like this," I said. "It was my understanding that..."

"Dian made up the difference," she said. "She understood how it was with me. I'm an *artist*. You can't be *creative* in one of those public hencoops. I told them that. I told them, just give me my allowance and let *me* worry about how far it will go, huh?" Her eyes narrowed. "Which agency did you say you were with, again?"

"I'm with the Bureau of Non-Terran Affairs, Miss Carr. I have absolutely no interest in how you choose to spend your allowance."

"Well, just why *are* you here, anyway?"

"I'm here because Dian Knight has disappeared," I said.

Her jaw dropped open, exposing neat, even rows of carnivorous teeth. "How do you mean that—disappeared?" she demanded.

"Disappeared," I repeated. "Without a trace. When is the last time you saw her?"

"I—yesterday. In the afternoon. I was just getting up."

"You were sick yesterday?"

"No, I—say, what is all this? I *normally* get up in the afternoon. And it's none of *your* business!"

"Okay, okay," I said. "Just tell me about Dian. Was she alone when you saw her?"

- "No, of course not," she said. "She had that colonist fellow with her. Big, strange-looking man. You know, I bet *he* made me sick!"

"How's that again?" I said.

"He comes from some other planet, right? Who *knows* how many bugs he's carrying on him? He could be starting an *epidemic*, just wandering around this city!"

"You should only know," I muttered to myself.

"Hah?"

"It's not likely," I said. "He had to go through Bio-Customs. They don't even let stray space-faring spores through."

"Yeah? Well, *something's* made me sick!"

"No doubt," I said. "Let's get back to Miss Knight. She had Bjonn with her, you say. Why did they come here?"

"I don't know," she said, a little reflectively. "Funny you should ask. She seemed, oh, I dunno ... different."

"Different?" My ears were pricked up.

"Well, like, I don't really know ... kinda glow-y, real happy, even."

"What did she do? What did she say? Did she pack any clothes or anything?"

"Ummm, yes, I guess she did. Not a lot, though. Nothing much more than you'd want for a night out." She smirked at that one. She'd figured it all out, she had. "Just a little bag."

"Were *you* out of the room at all during that time?"

"Me? No, I don't—oh, yes, I was for a minute. The fellow, Dian had told him I was an artist. He wanted to see my stuff. I have a studio—in there." She waved her arm vaguely at a closed door.

"This room in here is yours?" I asked.

"I use it, yes. It's really for both of us. But since my own room is just *filled up* with my equipment, I kinda use this room, too."

"I see. And while you were in the other

room, with Bjonn, was the door opened or closed?"

She leaned closer to me, as though trying to make me out in the murk. I wondered it she'd thought of turning up the lights, and then dismissed the notion. She'd surely not want brighter lights in this slovenly room. "Just what is it you think you're pinning on me, mister?" she asked. She had the whole line down perfect—even the inflection. Right off a nighttime melodrama on the 3-D.

"I'm asking if you could watch what Dian was doing out here, while you were in your, ahh, studio with Bjonn," I said.

Her bristles withdrew. "Ummm, well, no, I guess I wasn't paying much attention. I, umm, probably closed the door—one of my best renderings is mounted on the back of the door, and..."

"So Dian could have picked up something out here and you wouldn't have known," I finished it for her.

"Picked up *what*?" she said. "Just what are you talking about?"

I sighed. "Used your card today?" I asked.

"My card? My credit card? No..."

"See if you can find it," I suggested.

She pushed herself to her feet and moved over to a piece of furniture half buried under a pile of something-or-other. She pawed through the pile for a bit, and then reached under it. Half the pile slid to the floor, where it was absorbed by a mound of clutter already there. She paid no attention to it. She rooted about in the chest of drawers, or whatever it was for a while, and then moved on to another high mound which turned out to be a chair, under all the debris stacked on it. Plastic infomat printouts went flying. An old and very musty towel landed at my feet. I leaned over to pick it up between thumb and forefinger, and an unpleasant odor assailed

my nostrils. Given another week or two, and I think life might have been spontaneously generated in that towel. Particularly in this hothouse environment.

By now she was beginning to look a little frantic. She stopped, fixed her gaze on me, and stated, "I can't find it. I know exactly where I keep it, and it is not there." She opened her mouth to continue, but I interrupted her.

"Did Dian know where you kept it?" I asked.

"She knew well enough that it was always in my sporan," she said, nodding emphatically. Her turban was starting to come loose.

"Where's your sporan?" I asked.

"That's it! I can't find my sporan," she said. Her chins quivered with her indignation.

My eyes wandered aimlessly, then returned to the pile I'd moved from the chair I was in to the floor at my side. Amid the rumpled clothing was a shaggy tail of fur. I reached down and pulled it free: it was a side pouch of synthetic fur, ending in a floppy tail. "Is this—?"

"That's it," she cried, pouncing upon it and wresting it from my hand.

"Please check it out," I said, feeling a vague sense of anticlimax.

She dumped the entire contents out on top of what remained of the pile on the chest of drawers. Her fingers rifled through the new debris and emerged triumphantly. "Got it!" she said. Her tone was a crow of pleasure—as though she had somehow bested me in a covert contest.

"Let's see," I requested, holding out my hand. She surrendered the tab of homogenous plastic to me with poor grace.

I turned it over and stared at its face.

Every credit card has its molecular key that identifies it to its owner's account. Every card is unique; no one has ever

succeeded in counterfeiting a card. A card can be stolen, but once reported stolen it is valueless, and the rightful owner is issued a new card. A simple consultation with the infomat is all that is necessary. So cards are rarely stolen these days.

But one was. This card carried a name in simple block letters: *Dian Knight*. To its right was an embossed thumbprint.

Dian had switched cards. "This isn't your card," I said. "This is Dian's."

"What?" she screeched. "That's whose?"

"Where's your infomat?" I asked, wearily.

"In there," she said, pointing through a half-open door.

It was obviously Dian's room: the cheerful late-afternoon light that streamed in through the windows only pointed up the neatness of the room and its effects. I found the infomat next to a chair that folded out into a bed.

I punched in my code and got Credit Clearance. "What's your full name?" I called out.

"Terri Carr," she answered.

"No middle names, no marriage-contract names?"

"No, of course not," she said, her voice trailing off. I requested information on the recent uses of Miss Terri Carr's credit.

Paydirt, as the old saying goes: two continental hops to the west coast, to Southern Pacifica. Pod to downtown Santa Barbara in northern Southern Pacifica.

And then: nothing. No further uses. Absolutely nothing.

"How much did you say your regular allowance was?" I called out.

She told me.

"Well, I think you'd better prepare to draw in your belt a little," I said.

"What do you mean?" She was filling the open doorway with her bulk. I was getting tired of her.

"It's been spent," I said.

I took the time to do a thorough search of Dian's room, although not with much hope of finding anything. Still, I hoped I might turn up something that would point in the direction she had fled. People rarely manage to just 'disappear' on their own hook. It isn't that easy. When one thinks of escape, he usually thinks in terms of escape to some place—a place in some way familiar to him, or a place he's always wanted to see. More likely even, he thinks of escape to some place where he has friends; contacts: some place where he will not be alone.

Bjonn was an alien to this planet. He could hardly have contacts or friends anywhere. He would have no preferences for any one spot on the globe. And no real knowledge of any given area's advantages or disadvantages, either.

So that left Dian. And Dian had roots. She had grown up, left behind a family, friends, associates, play-mates, room-mates. She had lived in various cities during her life. Some she would not want to revisit; others might arouse nostalgia from her and a desire to return. I had to gamble on a clue in her past that would point out the direction she was taking—because unless we sighted her by chance, there was no other way.

This is, as I said, the Age of Anonymity. This is an era when one can see, in the order of a day's business, several thousand faces. Commuting alone: I shared my daily trips on the tubes with tens of thousands, whose throngs I must push my way through. As a consequence, privacy is a very personal and closely guarded right. One does not stare at strangers—one *never* meets another's eyes when out in public. It isn't done. It strips your own defenses as readily as it does his: that shocking moment of *contact* can leave you shaking and nauseated.

Bjonn was a striking figure of a man—but how many of those he passed among would notice him, even to the extent of becoming aware of his striking qualities? We could blanket the 3-D with his hologram, and we would receive millions of false reports on his whereabouts, and—probably—none genuine. Talk about your haystacks and needles—!

I found nothing of value in Dian's room. She had a few private tapes, a thin sheaf of printouts—mostly fashion notes for women—and a privately made pornographic book, much thumbed; its plastic binding in tatters. But no correspondence—if she received any, she did not keep printouts—no personal effects from her childhood. I wondered if she had successfully boxed her past and put it behind her. Most people do—I wondered if I was the only exception.

"You've still got her card," Terry Carr said to me when I returned to the humid gloom of the other room.

"That's right," I said.

"Well—?"

"Well, what?"

"Aren't you going to give it back?"

I stared at the gross creature with ill-concealed dislike. "Miss Carr, this is not your card. Your card was stolen, and you should report it and have another issued in your name. This card is evidence, and does not belong to you."

"But she *gave* it to me!" she yelled.

"She did not have the right to give it to you," I said. "If you used it you would be guilty of violating the law."

"But she used *mine*!"

"I'll see what I can do about having the amount she used refunded from her account to yours," I said. "You won't starve."

"She's not coming back, is she?"

"I doubt it."

"What am I going to do for *rent*?"

"I suggest you find another roommate," I said. "One who can be equally tolerant of your little foibles. It's a big city—you shouldn't have much trouble."

As the door to the apt slammed shut behind me, I heard her begin wailing with sobs of self-pity.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I HAD TO put in for Bureau clearance for a hop to Southern Pacifica—that is, if I wanted to put the expenses on the Bureau account rather than my own. So I had to talk to Conners.

"Pacifica," he said. "Why do you need to go out there?" Conners is in Cost Accounting.

"Mainly because that's where our missing persons last were," I said, wishing I could thumb off the connection and terminate the whole inquisition.

"Is there some reason why one of our people in Pacifica could not handle it?" Conners asked politely. His detachment came to him easily; Conners' office is in our main office in Geneva, and as far as I know he hasn't stirred from that spot in twenty years.

"There are a number of reasons, but the main one is that this investigation is *my* job—not that of some nit in Pacifica," I said, my temper fraying at the edges.

Conners tut-tutted me, and then asked me to hold. The screen flashed a couple of times, and lit up with "Please hold," while I sat in my office and twiddled my fingers. I thought of waiting until he returned, then flashing him *my* Please Hold signal for a moment or two. But I didn't. I thought about things like that, but I rarely did them. A pity.

He was checking me out, of course, probably with Tucker. I could imagine Tucker telling him in that lazy drawl of his, "Oh, the boy is getting nervous; I lit a little fire under him t'other day. Thinks he could ease his way with a paid vacation on the coast and be out from under my thumb." Or maybe, "You know how it is," a chuckle, "fellow takes his title seriously—'field investigator'—too seriously." Or most likely, "No need for him to go out; we've got plenty of people out there can get the job done; fact is, Dameron's under a bit of a cloud these days..." It would all come down to the same answer, I was sure. And the thing was, I couldn't be sure it wasn't true—*was* I just looking for a change of scenery, an out from the hot box? Why *did* I have to go out there myself? Because I thought I might just sniff out something a more dispassionate investigator would overlook? And just how likely was *that*, anyway?

The screen flashed again and the speaker tweeted to let me know Conners was back—just in case I might be preoccupied with a finger-count or something of the sort.

Conners looked up. Light glinted for a moment on his bald head. "It's all been cleared," he said. "I hope you have a productive trip." And then the screen cleared and went blank.

The HST took only a little over an hour—trips this short usually take longer by air than those which allow a full trajectory—and soon I was amid the sunwashed stucco cliffs of Southern Pacifica, that vast man-made sprawl that covers the entire southern half of the state of California and the western parts of Arizona and Nevada. Never my favorite part of the world, I found myself wondering what its attraction had been to Dian and Bjonn. Or was it just that she'd already discovered her

roommate's credit went no further?

The terminal was built over a portion of what had once been the San Pedro Channel, only just east of Catalina Island. These days it was an island in name only, since the city of Southern Pacifica had been built out over the water on piers for miles. I was standing in a passenger lounge, staring around me and trying to put myself into *their* shoes. What had Dian and Bjonn been thinking when they stood here? Had they been perplexed, or were they already certain of the next leg of their flight? Had Bjonn stared out the big polarized windows at the muted scene of bright sun and white concrete and the tall, rocket-like shapes of the HST planes, or had he followed Dian immediately across the lounge for the local tube-terminal? I scanned slowly around the room. People, coming and going, few pausing to sit and rest. A big 3-D on one side of the room, a soap playing itself out on its scene-shifting stage. A screen, dominating the other interior wall, with arrivals and departures flickering across in bright green block letters a foot high. A vending area, near the exit doors, headlines and come-on blurbs racing across the screen over its printout in mockery of the larger screen nearby. The few seats were hard and uncomfortable—no one lingered here long.

I joined the crowd off another plane and made for the exit. Every man, woman and child who had ever passed through this terminal had robbed it of a little of its life and individuality. It had long ceased to have any. It was just a place one went through to get from one place to another, not even a way-station.

Several tubes terminated here. Dian and Bjonn had taken the through-express to Santa Barbara. I passed my card over the turnstile eye and went through to board a through-express.

The tube made the nearly 120 miles in

thirty minutes—slower than I'm used to, but then they take life at a more leisurely pace in Pacifica.

Santa Barbara is regarded by the locals as an island of culture and history amid the enormous population-growth and mushrooming megacity of Pacifica, but to me it looked more like a slum. Narrow, twisting streets, ancient tumble-down architecture dating, it's said, from the time the Spanish first colonized the coast, and a jungle of untidy plant-life that seemed to be winning an age-old battle with the artifacts of men. And no pods. The tube station had only lifts to the surface, and there I found no covered arcades, no climate-control, nothing in fact but the bare face of the city. Appropriate as a shrine for visits, perhaps, but to live in—? No thanks.

It was easy to see why no further record had been found. Dian and Bjonn could hardly have summoned up transportation with a credit card here if they'd wished it. I stood blinking in the sun and wondered just what I'd do next.

"Hey, goodfella, you lost?"

It was a kid. I looked down at him and felt the shock of premonition. He didn't look over nine or ten, his grinning face was the color of teak, and his sun-bleached hair was golden-white. His teeth flashed ivory in the sun, and his eyes were the palest blue. He could've been Bjonn's son or younger brother.

"You tell me," I said. "Am I lost?" I gestured around me at the white stucco, red tile roofs so low that the whole street was awash in light, and the dark green hues of the palms and ivy on the walls.

"Maybe you need a smart guide—show you around the town?" He winked. Clever little bastard; I wondered if his virgin sister—or maybe his virgin mother, they never do things by halves, do they?—was next on the ticket. I had the feeling I'd

walked into a very bad old melodrama ... *live and in solid color* ... I waited for the next cliché to drop.

"What you want," he continued, "is a cycle. The only way to get around." He gestured, and I saw a man down the street perched upon an ungainly device with two high, narrow wheels. As he peddled toward us he took a wobbling route, and I wondered how much further he'd make it before falling off.

"One of those things?" I asked. "No, thanks. It's too late in life to try that trick."

"They got them with three wheels too—for the ladies and the old men," he said. I gave him a sharp look, but his face was bland.

"Tell me something," I suggested. "Is there a place around here that's cool and out of the sun, where a tired old man could sit down for a moment?"

"Sure. You want me to come along and show you?"

"Why not?" I said.

It wasn't exactly what I had in mind—I could have used a place with eating cubicals for a fast bit of refreshment—but he led me into a little vest-pocket park just down the street. In the shade the dry air was much cooler, and the smooth plastic of a bench felt almost soft.

"Okay," I said. "Now tell me about cycles."

"It's the only way to get around, you know what I mean?" the kid grinned. "They pass a law—this town is a landmark. No cars. No pods. No nothing except cycles—the kind you work with your feet."

"You live here?" I asked. I didn't see any cycle around that belonged to him.

"Naw, I live down south," he said, waving his hand in the direction of most of Southern Pacifica. He shrugged. "But this is a nice place to visit."

"Everybody who comes here—do they all

get cycles?"

"Most people. Some walk."

"And if you wanted a cycle, how would you get one?"

"Oh, mebbe you buy one—or mostly you just hire one, by the day or the week, you know?"

"Most people who come here—they hire them?"

"Sure."

"How many shops hire cycles?"

"Round here? Just one."

"I think I'd like to pay that shop a visit," I said, climbing back to my feet.

"Sure thing," he said. "Bout time," he added with another grin.

The cycle shop was a pleasant little place just up the block the opposite direction from that which we'd come. Old Spanish (or fake-Spanish) architecture provided a row of pillared arches, inside of which were grouped cycles in stands and an old man in a relaxer. The old man wore a toga of loose-woven mesh and not a lot else. The town fathers apparently had a casual attitude about such things. I stepped under the ubiquitous red tile roof and he opened his eyes and looked up at me questioningly.

"Hey, Mr. Hoolihan, I bring you a customer," my guide sang out.

"Eh, Mitchell," the old man said. "Always in my siesta—you little smartass." He sat up. "What can I be doing for you, huh?" He cackled. "Would you like to hire a cycle, or perhaps do you want to hire a cycle?" He laughed some more at his joke.

"Neither," I said. Both gave me startled looks. What was this? A new joke?

"Yesterday," I said. "Last night. A man and woman came here to rent cycles from you."

"Ah, yes," Old Hoolihan said. "Yes?"

"You remember then, do you?" I asked.

"I remember that men and women have come to me to hire cycles, yes," he said with

evident relish. "All day long, and into the night. It is my business, and I have the monopoly here."

"A specific man and woman," I said with patient care. "A small woman, kind of bouncy and—" but that wasn't true any more—"Uhhh, very relaxed and certain in her manners. Short-cropped, green-frosted hair... The man looked like the kid, here, grown up. Tall. Almost seven feet tall."

Almost reluctantly it seemed, the man nodded. A stray breeze poked its way into the open shop and stirred the fine white hair on his head at that same, precise moment. I felt a tingling.

"They were here," the old man said. "They were here. I remember them."

"They rented cycles?"

"One. A tandem." Seeing the question on my lips, he added, "Intended for two to ride—I only have two in the shop." He gestured and in the gloom I saw the second, two sets of handlebars, two seats, one behind the other, leaning against a rear wall, dusty and long unused. "Not many people want them. But those two—they saw them and they wanted one. Laughed a lot, they did."

"How long did they, uhh, hire it for?"

"Told me a week. Lots of people do that, but stay longer, keep their cycles longer. No matter to me. I get paid. This is the only shop that hires cycles."

"A week..." I reflected. They weren't just passing through, then. But where were they likely to have gone? Who did they know here? "Where's your infomat?" I asked.

"Informat? I don't have no truck with those things," he said. "You want one, you try the tube station."

I guess I was staring at him a little strangely. He added, in a defensive tone, "This town is a landmark, mister. A place of the past. We don't go for all those modern gadgets. You won't likely find one anywhere

else."

"You want I should show you?" the kid asked. He'd been standing to one side, acting like a natural part of the scenery until now.

"Sure," I said, although I really doubted I needed a local guide to find the tube-station's infomats. But I wanted to talk to the kid some more. "I might be back for a cycle," I told the old man.

"Don't let go all your three-wheelers," the boy shouted back at him. He was laughing and grinning again.

I checked with the Bureau. A quick computer-check hadn't turned up any known friends or relatives in Santa Barbara when I'd first discovered that had been the fugitives' destination. But such a search had been confined largely to names given on Bureau applications and questionnaires submitted by Dian each time she'd moved up a rank, and those forms had called simply for references and next-of-kin. Nobody had ever asked Dian to compile a list of her friends. And no one had checked to see if anyone she *had* listed had since moved to Santa Barbara. So the indepth research took a little longer. It required some human programming and innovation. That had been one of my jobs before I'd left: setting these wheels in motion.

I might as well not have bothered, for all the results I got. The Bureau had turned up absolutely no leads at all. "We're not a Mission Persons Bureau you know," was about the way it was put to me. For which, you may read: "Look, Mac, I don't know nothin' about this job—so whad'ya expect, anyway?"

In any case, I thumbed the disconnect with more force than was necessary, and ended up mouthing a small imprecation the effect of which was not lost on my erstwhile companion.

"No good, huh?" he said.

"Mitchell—is that your name; Mitchell?—let us find a place once more to sit and talk," I said.

Having nothing much else to do, and apparently fascinated by the oddity of my behavior, he assented cheerfully.

We ended up in the same little park, still deserted as before, and sat again on the same bench.

"You look to me as if you're the sort who gets around," I said for openers. "You see a lot."

He nodded, grinning.

"Did *you* see the man and woman I described?" I asked.

"Oh, sure," he said. "I saw them this morning. They was riding that cycle, you know, and wow! They sure was something!"

"How come you didn't tell me that before?" I asked.

"How come you don't ask me?" he replied, with flawless logic. It's little endearing traits like that which make me so fond of computers.

"Any idea where they're staying?" I asked. I knew already they weren't checked into any public hostelry.

"I don't know," he said, pulling at his lower lip with his fingers. "Maybe up in the hills. I saw them going that way. But maybe they just riding around, you know?"

"If you were me," I said, "and you wanted to find them, what would you do?"

"Oh, hell," he said. "That's easy. I'd just hang around for a while. They turn up. This is a small place, you know? Not like the city."

I rented a three-wheeler—a tricycle, it's called—and set out to see what I could of Santa Barbara.

It's not a big town—Mitchell was right. Many centuries old, it seemed currently in a state of genteel decay, aided and abetted by

its curiously languid inhabitants. I rode down to the waterfront—still where the original waterfront was, and surrounded, in a great U, by the enveloping arms of Pacifica reaching out on piers over the water both to the north and the south. The water was brackish and oily and slapped against the sea wall under the docks with the same air of helpless lassitude that affected the rest of the city. "Used to be lots nicer," Mitchell, my guide, informed me. "Before they build the city." He waved his arms to take in the white man-made cliffs of the city on each horizon. "No drilling, either." Squat black oil-drilling rigs worked thumpingly directly to the west, a few miles out. Well, a mechanized society runs on oil. It seemed curious and ironic that this town, huddled in the arms of the modern world, had turned its back on progress and a sense of tomorrow to dream of yesterday. Even the sun seemed faded and fraught with nostalgic haziness. But perhaps that was just atmospheric pollution.

We circled around the town. There was little traffic; either the locals preferred the cooler times of day, or there simply weren't that many people around. I favored the latter notion: it was easily accepted.

But time passed inexorably, and finally I'd had enough of aimless wandering and the pious guidebook inanities of my companion. And my legs ached. When I surrendered the tricycle to old Hoolihan my thighs and calves hurt in hundreds of novel places and I felt that the simple act of standing upright was a brand new accomplishment. Then Hoolihan told me, as he handed back my credit card after refunding the unused portion of my deposit, "Saw those people you were wanting."

Adrenalin surged through my system. I glanced back into the rear of the shop. *Where one dusty tandem cycle had stood now stood two.* The second sparkled with

chromework and plastic highlights, and I wondered why I hadn't noticed it the instant I'd come in.

"Told them a fella was looking for them," the old man added.

"What did they say?" I demanded, wanting to pound the facts out of the stubborn old fool.

"They just laughed," he said, a twinkle in his eyes. "They just laughed to themselves."

I stared out into the long shadows of the afternoon street. "Where'd they go?" I asked.

"As to that, I wouldn't know," he said. "They took a tube, I'd guess." He paused and then dropped the bombshell he'd been saving. "All four of 'em," he said.

CHAPTER EIGHT

I GOT HOME LATE that night—and the time differential which had worked in my favor earlier was now against me. I skipped my final meal and went straight to bed.

... where I dreamed.

I was sitting in a dark room. Others were sitting in a large circle around the edges of the room, their faces in shadow. We were linked, our hands joined. I felt the terrible thrill of the forbidden. A light began to glow in the center of the room. It began searching our faces, passing quickly over faces I did not know and could not remember. Then it stopped, directly across the circle from me. The face was Bjonn's. His eyes were focused directly on me, even though I was certain I was not visible in the darkness, and that the light must be blinding him. I stared into his eyes and knew that he could see me, was watching me. It frightened me. But it also held me,

transfixed. Then the light seemed to shift and I was aware that it was Bjonn's eyes which were emitting the light, twin beams that were held on me, pinpointing me, making me visible to everyone in the room.

And I was naked.

Worse: I was sitting on, attached to, a food-evacuation unit.

Someone handed me a meal-tube.

That's when I woke up.

I was sweating profusely. I got up and looked at the time. Early morning: 04:12. I depolarized the windows and stared out. Moonlight and windows. Some were lit. Rutland is a bedroom community, but not everyone sleeps at night any more. It's an old instinct, one of the oldest, but in a complex civilization you can't just shut down the machinery after the sun sets—after all, in other parts of the world it may be high noon. Life goes on, the world goes on, twenty-four hours out of twenty-four.

I used the 'fresher, and felt a little better. My stomach complained—I'd treated it to a pretty lopsided schedule today—so I went into the meal-cubical, attached myself and sat down, and reached for the tube.

And stopped.

I was sweating again.

The dream: what did the dream *mean*? What was going on inside me? Something was messing me up. I pulled the tube to my lips, savoring the old familiar taste and feel, the plastic nozzle with its imbedded tooth marks, the big teat with its vari-flavored algae—and I had no appetite.

I sat there until my thighs went numb, and then decided in favor of expediency. I dropped a pill to start things moving, thumbed the evacuator to internal irrigation, flushed my system, and restocked myself. It was mechanical and joyless and I kept remembering my dream. Afterwards I

had to stare at the menu on the wall to see what I'd had. My mouth just tasted sour.

I went back to my bed, lay in it for a while, and stared at the aimlessly moving pictures on the backs of my eyelids. Finally I got up again. If I was going to keep running through the details of my work, I might as well do it in an organized fashion. I sat down at the infomat, punched the code for my office recordostat, and started dictating additional prelims.

Dian and Bjonn had flown to Pacifica, and gone up to Santa Barbara. They arrived late in the evening—they had left Megayork soon after I'd run out on them; I already knew that. Okay, they took out a cycle. (Why didn't we have a record of that before? Because Dian had simply left her roommate's card with the shop as deposit. But that implied—)

In a strange little town at night, with a cycle and no useable credit (they had Bjonn's card, maybe, if he hadn't already disposed of it—but they hadn't used it. Dian knew how instantly traceable credit use was. She was Level Seven, wasn't she?)—it pointed to one obvious fact. They (she) knew someone who lived there. Knew someone well enough (or hoped she did) to drop in on him/her/them unexpectedly, without advance warning.

And the next day there were four of them. Four laughing, happy people, looking like people in love, radiant and joyful—and *somehow alien*.

He'd gotten to them, to Dian's friends. Bjonn had seduced them, as he had Dian. First just Bjonn. Then Bjonn and Dian. Now Bjonn, Dian, and two more. It was starting to snowball.

Bjonn was a point of contagion.

It was getting out of hand. It wasn't just a simple disappearance any more. It was something bigger, something strange, with ominous overtones.

Something which wouldn't let me sleep.

I coded into Credit Clearance again, and had a search made. Object: Santa Barbara couple, four fares on the tube out of Santa Barbara, destination unknown, for a one-hour period in the late afternoon. It wasn't really a narrow enough criterion, but it might find me something.

It didn't. No one with an established residence in Santa Barbara had bought four tube trips out in the right time-slot.

Where had I gone wrong?

Maybe the couple didn't have an established residence in Santa Barbara? Maybe they had a residence somewhere else, and were only extended visitors themselves?

Make it just four fares on one card, then, for the appropriate time-slot.

Nothing.

I resisted the urge to do something destructive to the infomat, and told myself several times that it was simply a tool—a useful, if less than intuitively gifted, tool. It would tell me only the truth—and it would answer only the questions I asked.

Two cards, then. One his, one hers. Two cards, four fares. Narrow it down a little: two cards issued to a contracted couple. (Or was that cutting it too fine? What if they *weren't* contracted?) I pulled three replies on that. I had a fast biographical research made on each of the three couples.

I hadn't thought the traffic out of Santa Barbara had been that heavy. But then, I'd forgotten that the town was a tourist spot. I'd overlooked the obvious: a man and his wife and their two, state-approved, children. Or rather, to be more exact, three men, three wives, and three sets of two children.

So Dian's friends—relatives?—weren't contracted to each other.

I thought about doing a make on each and every individual who had used his card

for himself and someone else. I had the time-slot right. There had to be a finite number, I knew that.

Two thousand, eight hundred, thirty-six.

I had it verified, and there it was: 2,836 people had used that tube station at that hour for themselves and a guest. I shook my head in disgust. When I looked up I saw the sunlight streaming in through my bedroom windows. Still depolarized. I looked at the time: 05:28 hours. And the sun was already up.

Santa Barbara must be Southern Pacific's very own Central Park, for God's sake. I wondered where they'd kept themselves hidden all day, and then snorted in disgust. Every damned one of them would have to be verified. The data wouldn't take long; it was the idea of going over it all, trying to see where connections could be established, doing the *human* part of the job—

I set it up for printout in my office, and went back into the bedroom, pausing only to dim the windows and reset the alarm. Then I managed to go back to sleep. This time I slept soundly.

I spent the afternoon running cross-checks on my list of potentials. The idea was to eliminate as many as possible with the coarse comb before resorting to the fine one. The easiest was an immediate check on their whereabouts. I had a strong suspicion that the two I was looking for would also have disappeared. Of course, a proportion of those who had been in Santa Barbara were vacationers, tourists, or otherwise not presently tied down to anything from which they'd be immediately missed. But I managed to account for a thousand, one hundred, three that way. It was a definite step in the right direction.

And by late that afternoon, I had my list down to thirteen.



Not one of them checked out on any list Dian had ever made, but I simply had to accept that. Three were from Tokyo, and that looked promising. Dian had lived in Tokyo. She had to have known people there who didn't appear on her lists.

I decided to dwell on those three.

Two were young—both in their twenties, Robert Linebarger and Karilin Mills. The third, one Arthur Ficarra, was in his eighties. I decided to eliminate Ficarra. He was on a retirement tour, anyway. He'd worked for the Bureau of Environmental Control—a garbageman.

Both Linebarger and Mills had taken tubes north to San Luis Obispo, where Pacifica officially ends and the city tubes terminate. There Linebarger had hired a car. Mills hadn't used any credit there. Linebarger had taken a car with seats for four.

It was starting to add up.

He'd given his destination as San Francisco, in Bay Complex. He was taking the Coast Road. Just sightseeing.

I decided San Francisco could wait until the next day.

The okay for my second trip to the west coast came through without any questions asked. I decided my promptness in returning from the first one had been a mark in my favor. But I really didn't give a damn. Here I was, chasing down after-the-fact details, while something was going on out there, three thousand piddling miles away, and I couldn't figure what it was.

It was raining when we landed in Oakland, and the outside temperature was in the middle fifties. Fortunately, I was spared any direct contact with the weather. I tubed over to San Francisco, and took a pod to the main branch office of the car-rental company. They do a thriving business on the west coast with people who want to explore the mountains and the still-

undeveloped shore areas.

I was expected, and a lush young woman with dusky nipples ushered me into the branch veep's office.

"Your car hasn't checked in as yet," he told me after a handshake. Correy Burke was twenty years younger than I'd expected—a mere youth and not likely out of his mid-twenties. It made me bristle somewhere inside my Id: *clean young kid makes it into Private Enterprise*—He'd be retired and sitting on a handsome fortune before I was halfway to my pension. To give him his due, he seemed to sense the awkwardness of our relative ages and positions, and he was pretty nice to me. In itself that was a surprise.

"When do you expect them?" I asked.

"Them?" he repeated. "We have it down for a single—a Mr. Linebarger..."

"I'm assuming he has three guests," I said.

"Oh, well... that would make a difference in our rate differential," he said, unobtrusively fingering a few buttons on his private console, and no doubt taking notes. Oh, he'd earned his position—that was obvious. He looked up again. "Sorry," he said. "About the projected hour of arrival—it depends a good deal on that particular run. It's the original El Camino Real, you know—the Pacific Coast Road, we usually call it. Runs right along the coast. Historical—and unimproved. I've known folks to do it in a day—others have taken two, three days. Depends, also, on whether they stop often, or even lay over for a while." He smiled. "Our rates are based on both mileage and elapsed time. We encourage them to enjoy themselves, not to rush things. After all, scenery like that, you want to let it really soak in, right?"

"So you really don't know when they'll get in, is that right?"

"That pretty well sums it up, yes."

"But you'll have a watch out—?"

"Oh, indeed. In fact, I'll have a special query on that car—we'll have it checked out for additional occupancy, you see." He consulted his informat. "Yes, I see we have sufficient funds on deposit to cover it." He smiled up at me again. "We always encourage a heavy deposit on trips like these. Makes it more painless to spend it after you've transferred your credit on a provisional basis anyway."

Yes sir, that boy was going right to the top of the heap.

He suggested I tube down to Monterey, where the car would actually be coming in. "We don't allow cars on city streets, you know," he told me as if I was some hick who hadn't come from the first city to ban private vehicular traffic something well over a century ago. So I went down to Monterey, found the rental garage, nicely located on the southern edge of the Greater Bay Complex, a convenient pod lane stacked with waiting pods close by.

And then I waited.

And waited.

And waited.

After a while, I was bored out of my mind.

I was here because it was important to apprehend our two original runaways. I had no illusions about my abilities to do that—I had a court-issued restraining order ready to serve on Dian whenever I next saw her for desertion of a government job and betrayal of Bureau secrets (ho, ho) to a registered alien (small irony, there). I also had a Planetary Arrest to serve on Bjonn, since as an alien he had no citizenship and no rights here on Earth. It was a ticklish point, and one I was sure the legal department had agonized over, but it boiled down to the fact that Bjonn had been here on good behavior, and it was now felt he'd abused our

hospitality. His dealings as an Emissary would necessarily be formally restricted from now on.

After we caught them, that is.

After I caught them.

If I did. Or, rather...

When I did.

Finally, a man at the garage suggested I get a room for the night. "We'll let you know when they pull in," he said. "You don't have to sit around here all night."

So I took a room in a nearby hotel—just a nearly featureless cubical with an eating nook off to one side, a bed in the middle, and a 3-D facing the foot of the bed. Out of desperation, I turned on the 3-D.

An apparent hole opened up in the wall of the room behind the 3-D, and ghostly images moved about in it. The control was on the stand built into the bed's headboard, and I fiddled with it until the tuning was accurate and I had both sound and solid color. The 3-D stage was small—a cube no more than two feet on each side—but after all, this was just a cheap hotel room. The set was probably twenty years old. The sound didn't synch perfectly to the figures—every time a player crossed the middle of the stage to the left side, his voice came from the far left—but that probably meant a couple of speaker-strips in the wallpaper were dead. So what else was new?

I had inadvertently tuned into one of the pirate channels—which probably explained the difficulty in properly tuning it. I'd heard rumors you couldn't pick up a pirate channel on hotel sets or other "public" sets—that they had been fixed to reject pirate signals. But maybe the source of this signal was too close—most of them broadcast from moving ships in the Pacific, beaming for one of the big overhead direct-relay satellites, and thus getting pretty close to world-wide coverage, but perhaps this one was broadcasting locally, on direct line-

of-sight, ship to shore.

It was Shakespeare, so I watched it. "Midsummer Night's Dream." A good cast, I thought. Naturally, they played up the bawdy aspects of the play. Titania and Oberon were played nude, and Titania's love-making with Bottom, the weaver cursed with the head of an ass, was dwelt upon with great lascivious detail. I found the pornography disturbing, but the play was, after all, Shakespeare, and vastly superior to the mind-rot to be found on the legal channels. Sometimes I wonder why the only interesting programming comes from the pirate channels—but then I remind myself that the vast majority of the populace, on Public Care and with little enough to abate their boredom, must prefer the lulling opiates of public 3-D. After all, anything too provocative might just provoke discontent.

I watched until the play concluded, and then switched off the set. I'd had my yearly dose of 3-D and could not return to the real world content. Soon after, I drifted into a hazy shade of sleep...

...from which the infomat buzzer jerked me awake what seemed like only minutes later.

"Mr. Dameron?" It was somebody I hadn't seen before, but he wore the uniform of the rental garage, and I could see the word "*manager*" emblazoned on a small badge he was wearing.

I blinked a couple of times and assured both of us that I was indeed Mr. Dameron.

"The car you were interested in just came in," he said.

I glanced at the time. 01:10 hours. I sighed. "Are you holding them?" I asked.

"There's just one man—the driver. We've told him he has a refund due and that we're clearing it out. I don't know how long we can stall him..."

"Are you checking out the car?" I asked.

"Sir?"

"There were four people in that car," I said, wondering if we had the wrong car, the wrong man, or what. "I understand you have ways of checking that out—and of adjusting the rates."

"Oh," he said. "I'll have them check that out. I just came on duty an hour ago, and I didn't find any memos on that. Thanks."

"Okay," I said, and thumbed off.

I dressed and went over to the garage. When I got there, the night manager and two men were standing in a semi-circle around the chair of a frightened-looking boy.

As soon as I approached the group, I knew something was wrong. I'd read Linebarger's biography, and he was a dark man in his late twenties. This kid could hardly be over graduation age, and he had red hair and very white skin, on which his freckles were pronounced blotches. He looked almost blue with fear, and he was hugging himself and shivering.

The three garagemen looked angry, but moved away in deference when I came up. The silence was hostile, and I guessed they'd found the evidence they'd been looking for of additional passengers.

"All right, son," I said as I stood looking down at the boy. "What's your name?"

His eyes were wide, and his skin so pale I could see the veins under it. "Uhh, Tanner, sir. Le-Leroy Tanner."

"How old are you, Leroy?"

"Nineteen. Uhh, sir."

"Nineteen," I repeated, for effect. "You didn't hire this car, did you?"

"No, sir. No, I didn't."

"You want to tell me about it?"

"Uhh, will you tell me something, please? Am I in trouble? I mean—legal trouble?"

"You mean, do you need a lawyer? I don't think so. Not if we can get this straightened out." I saw the manager give me a nod. I didn't return it. "We're

interested in the car."

"I met this man," he said. "He gave it to me. I mean, he told me I could have the use of it, if I turned it in up here. He said I might even get some credit transferred on it."

"You met a man," I said. "Tell me about that. Where did you meet him? And how?"

CHAPTER NINE

THE NEXT MORNING I took a rental car down the Coast Road, young Leroy Tanner in the other seat beside me.

We were on an automatic the first few miles, so I relaxed and turned to face him, picking up where we'd left off the night before. "You were hiking," I said. "Up from Pacifica? Isn't that quite a hike?"

He nodded, keeping his eyes on the road as though afraid to directly face me. "It seemed like a great way to do the summer," he said. "When I started, anyway. By the time I met Mr. Linebarger, I guess I'd had about enough."

"Tell me about it again. No pressure—just put it together the way you remember it."

He nodded again, and his Adam's apple throbbed convulsively, as if he was trying to swallow something too big for him. "Yeah," he said. "Well."

"By the time I got to Lucia, I'd really had it, you know? You get maybe three hours of sunshine a day, and the rest is fog and drizzle. It comes in off the ocean in the afternoon, fogs you in all night, and doesn't burn off until noon or later. I was damp all the time, and I had a cold—I *still* have a cold—and I still had a good way to go. So I thought, maybe I can get a lift, you know? Maybe somebody in a car will stop and pick me up. But they wouldn't I'd stand on one

of those horseshoe curves, and I'd wave, and they'd just crawl right by me. So slow I could see in and see their faces, and they always stared ahead, like I wasn't even there. I could've thrown myself right in front of them, and they'd just have run me over!" His voice cracked with emotion.

"It's a private world," I said. "People don't like to be intruded upon."

"I know," he said, snuffling a little. Maybe it was just his cold. "Well, anyway, I was up around Big Sur, and I was sitting in this fake lodge they have set up, you know, where they sell souvenirs and all that. I was just trying to get warm. And I saw this car pull in, and it had four seats, but just this man and woman in it. So I waited by the car until they came out, and I asked them, could I please have a ride. And the guy said—he was very nice about it—he said they'd like to, but they were on a short budget and couldn't afford it. And so I asked what he meant, and he said if I rode in their car they'd get charged for another person for the whole trip, and they couldn't afford that. Well, I've got a card, of course, but not very much credit left for this month, and I was afraid it would run over what I had, because the rental on a car like this is pretty high from what I hear—"

"You hear right," I said.

"—so I just thanked them. Then while I was watching them drive away, this quiet-looking man comes up to me. He's tall, dark, and—oh, I dunno ... he really seemed to understand about things and to, uhh, to care."

"He said he'd heard me talking to the other man, and he thought maybe he had an answer for my problems. We walked over to this other car, and he said, how would I like to drive it up to Monterey. He said he'd rented it down south, put down a big deposit on it, and now he had decided to stay in this area and he needed to get the car north and so I'd be helping him at the same

time. He told me I could put the leftover credit from the deposit on my card.

"Only problem was, I didn't know how to drive."

"He taught you, then?"

"Yeah. It took a while before he was satisfied I'd be all right, but he was a good teacher, very patient, and I learned." It isn't really that hard to learn; I'd learned myself that morning, in the practice lot the rental company provides. The car has a go pedal and a stop pedal, and you point the tiller where you want it to go. It has a radar system that stops it if you look like you intend to run into something, or slows you down if you're overtaking another car too fast. It has all the gadgets to keep you from hurting yourself, and automatic road-control on the approaches to the cities which guides you in automatically to the garages. It doesn't take long to learn.

"And then you drove up," I said. "To Monterey."

"Yeah. I guess *that* was a mistake."

The warning buzzer sounded; we were reaching the end of the automatic road. If I didn't show signs of alertness and take over the controls the car would automatically stop and park itself. I went through the proper motions.

We were entering the Coast Road, now, and on what I'd been told was The Wrong Side—the ocean side. "Most people go down south and bring cars *up*," the day manager had told me. "We have a hard time finding drivers going south. Something about driving along that sheer drop for a hundred miles scares them." I could understand why. There wasn't much beach along here—mostly just rocks, up-thrust from the surf. The road twisted its way along the cliff face, sometimes climbing high above the water, sometimes dipping down to within a few yards of the booming rollers. Vegetation was sparse and twisted,

and trees like gnarled old men reaching in vain for help and safety and shelter. Mist, looking like low-hanging clouds, sent fingers in over the coast, occasionally covering the windshield with tiny droplets of dew. The car automatically cleaned them off each time.

Then the road swung inland, around the chin of a low ridge and into a deeply grooved set of heavily forested valleys. High above us the sky turned bright blue, and from somewhere out of sight the sun sent down shafts that set the woods steaming.

"This is Big Sur country," the boy said. "Nice, isn't it?"

"If you go for that sort of thing," I said. The road was climbing now and I had to dodge cars parked barely off the pavement on the edge of the road. Nature-lovers, I suppose.

We passed odd-looking houses, all detached and on their own acreage, some perched on hillsides of naked rock, others almost lost among the evergreens. They were all stamped with the eccentricity of individuality, and I felt the air of nonconformity, of deliberate oddity, which always alienated me. Some people flaunt it. The people who lived here certainly did.

"Where's the town?" I asked.

"There isn't any—not really, anyway," Tanner said. "Just a cluster of stores and that fake-lodge I told you about. They're still up the road a bit."

"You mean the people who live here are all scattered around the place?" I asked, gesturing at a typical house we were passing.

"That's right," he said, his tone a little defensive.

I shook my head and drove on.

"Here it is," the boy said. I swung the car to the left, across the oncoming lane, and felt it brake itself as we crunched over

cinders into a parking space. We stopped smoothly, just six inches from the barrier. It had obviously been placed there for exactly that reason. I saw no scars upon its timbers.

"This is where you met Linebarger, it is?" I said.

He said it was.

"Let's climb out and take a look around," I suggested. "If you see him, let me know. But don't be really obvious about it."

"Okay." A little sullen.

The air was still damp and a little cool in the shade, uncomfortably warm in the sun. I made my way into the "fake-lodge" with all deliberate speed.

We talked to people, we hung around, we watched the cars that stopped, and we listened to the locals. And we saw and heard not one sign of Linebarger, Mills, Dian or Bjonn. I was beginning to feel foolishly frustrated, a vast sense of anticlimax hovering over me. Finally I decided to use an infomat and check in with my office. Maybe something had turned up.

I keyed in my own office infomat first, for messages. Instead there was a relay-click and Tucker's face filled the screen again. "About time you thought of that," he said.

I sighed. "Okay," I said. "Now, what's happened?"

"It isn't what's happened," he drawled, "it's what *hasn't* happened. Just where are our friends, the Happiness Twins?"

"Dian and Bjonn?"

"I think those are the ones, yes."

"Still missing," I said. "I have them pinned down, though."

"You do? Tell me about it."

I did. Without skipping any important details, but as concisely as possible. I was feeling moderately proud of myself when Tucker snapped, "You mean to tell me you've drawn a big imaginary net around some hundred square miles of undeveloped

area all on that flimsy piece of guesswork and circumstantial evidence?"

"Sir?"

"Let's start with Point One," he said, bringing his hands into view and ticking off his fingers. "Point One: You have not established the slightest actual, factual link between this Linebarger and the other one—Mills?—much less a link between them and your fugitives. Why, you haven't even found holograms of the two of them for confirmation by your cycle-shop man—and he's the only one who has seen all four of them together, as far as you know. Okay, Point Two: without confirming their connection to this Linebarger, you've gone and turned a car rental agency upside-down. You've spent good Bureau credit on renting a car for yourself, even! And you've operated on the assumption that this Linebarger, in turning his car over to somebody else, must be the party you want. That's points three, four and five, at least. Point Six is that you've assumed Linebarger and party—if they're the ones you want—are still in the immediate area of, what is it? Big Sur? If they are your people, do you think they'd lay as open a trail as that? Count on it: if they told your Tanner kid they were staying there, it was so he could pass that info along. By now they could be hundreds of miles away."

"How, sir? Both Dian and Bjonn have no credit—it's been cancelled. And I put a Temporary Hold on both Mills' and Linebarger's credit."

"You *what*? On whose authority?"

"On the Bureau's, sir."

"Oh, fine." He smote his brow in a fine gesture of defeat. "Just fine. And how would you like a civil suit slapped on you—on us?"

"I don't think it is that likely, sir—not if they're our people."

"You don't know that."

"I have a pretty strong hunch."

"Totally unconfirmed."

"Okay," I said, suddenly very mad. "I'll get confirmation, then!" And I disconnected.

I was still sitting in the infomat booth, figuring out the logistics of my next set of moves—drive down to Pacifica, or back to Monterey and hop down? Speed, vs. personal pleasure, of which I thus far enjoyed relatively little. And what about the kid, anyway?—when the infomat buzzed me.

It was Tucker again.

He spoke as if nothing had happened, as if my last outburst had never taken place. "I've sent a local man to that shop, with holograms," he said. "If these *are* our people, what do you plan next?"

"Only one thing I can think of," I said. "Bring in men and conduct a house-to-house search."

He gave me a look of incredulity. "Surely you jest," he said.

"I'm sure you have a better plan," I said.

He said nothing.

"So far I think I've done pretty well," I said. "But I'm just one man, and I have my limitations. I think we've about reached them. I've pinpointed their whereabouts for you to my own certainty. Now I pass the buck."

When he spoke, his voice had none of its former bark and bite. There was no trace of his drawl, either. Suddenly he sounded very tired. "We've reached a dead end," he said. "I'm going to ask you to abandon the case."

"Sir?" I asked, my brain reeling from this abrupt aboutface.

"We've pushed it further than I'd expected," he said. I noted that "we" in my mental jotbook. "I've taken it this far on my own authority. I can't buck it higher, and I can't push for anything like what it needs now—what you've suggested. There's no

real crime on the books, Dameron. We had very slim provocation for going this far. To take it further—to get warrants for Invasion of Privacy, which is what we'd need to conduct a search—it's just more than I can swing. It's over, can't you see that? You've done an excellent job. But there's pressure from above—you're needed on other work assignments. I can't keep you on this any longer. I had to go out on a long limb with Conners, and it's about to give way." I'd never heard him sound like that.

"What about the man in the cycle shop?" I asked. "What if he *does* confirm Linebarger and Mills? What then?"

"We'll kick it up to the next level, and see what the big boys have to say," Tucker said. "But I don't expect much, and neither should you."

LeRoy Tanner was leaning against the side of the car. "What's going to happen?" he asked.

"Nothing," I said, letting the bitterness cut into my voice. "It's being dropped."

"I don't get it," he said. I hadn't told him any of the background—*why* we wanted this Linebarger—anyway.

"You don't have to," I replied. "Get in. Time to go."

"Okay," he said, sounding as though he thought I must be blaming him for the whole thing.

"Relax," I told him. "It's not your worry. It's a nice day, and you're getting an extra ride out of it—for free. I might even swing that credit on deposit for you, too."

"Yeah?" he said, perking up considerably.

For a moment I felt a little better, a little happier. I took a deep breath, the air scented with evergreen suddenly alive in my throat, my lungs. I shrugged the weight from my shoulders. What the hell. It wasn't *my* problem any more. I'd done my part of

the job—I'd done more than had been expected of me. *I was okay.*

It was while we drove back up towards Monterey that the thought came to me that Tucker had known it would probably end like this all along. He'd known what would most likely happen—and he'd flayed me to get it this far before it stopped. Suddenly I hated the man. Damn his corrosive soul, anyway!

CHAPTER TEN

IN THE LATE FALL the green mountains of Vermont were a subdued brown. In Megayork the skies were gray and bleak, and matched my mood. I picked up Ruth Polonyck at the hencoop in Westport where she still lived, sharing a bunkroom with five other uncontracted girls, and took her to a party in Old Manhattan. Ruth had been brought into our department at the Bureau soon after the fuss over Dian Knight's untimely departure had died down, and I had the feeling that although she was still a Level Five, she was being groomed to take Dian's place.

I'd had some time to brood about things, and uppermost in my mind had been a question—still unsatisfactorily unanswered—about my boss's motivations.

I'm a civil servant. I put in for a job when I read the notice of an opening, took a battery of tests, and in spite of them I got the job. My advancement since then has been a slow and measured crawl, but it has been largely a function of my own aptitudes, talents and personality. Which is fine, as far as it goes—and if I never exceed Level Seven, I would at least have earned the right to remain on that level the rest of my working life, barring disasters, of course.

(At the time, I'd thought the whole Bjonn-Dian thing *was* a disaster. Perhaps I'd been right, but ... a disaster for whom?)

When you rise into the higher levels, however, it is less a factor of your test results and automatic promotions. Up there, in the stratified levels, you come face to face with the fact that a government, no matter how entrenched and bureaucratic, is still a basically political animal. And your job becomes a matter of politics—both polite and dirty.

Me, I always assume everyone I meet thinks as I do, wants what I want, and does as I do—until I'm proved wrong. If coincidence conspires to shield me from the truth, I will go on regarding my acquaintances and associates in that light for the longest time, blithely unaware of their true natures.

This man, Tucker: I took him at face value. I *needed* to. He fulfilled a need in me that I wasn't even aware of, then. I looked on him pretty much as I guess every boy looks on his father—part man, part god, someone you want to impress, someone whose judgement you never question, someone you assume reciprocates your feelings toward him to the extent that he, too, loves you.

But every boy who knows his father after he's six must—I assume—inevitably come to that moment of disillusionment when he finds his father's feet of clay. There comes a time when he can no longer escape the fact that his father is not all-knowing, all-wise, or all-loving. He finds out his father is living a separate life, and one which is not exclusively devoted to his son. He finds out his father is human.

Some sons, I'm told, never forgive their fathers that.

I never knew my father after the age of six. But I had Tucker.

Just what was Tucker's real relationship

with Dian Knight? Had there been something between the two of them? Or just the desire for something, on Tucker's part? You can see how my mind shied from the notion: Did Dad have a leech for his son's girlfriend? But of course Tucker wasn't really my father—and there was no real reason he shouldn't have had his own interest in Dian. She wasn't contracted to me or anything.

Tucker had thought a lot of Dian. Hindsight really helps, I've found. Little things I hadn't noticed, like the way Dian rose so readily through the ranks, the way Tucker seemed to be in closer contact with her than the rest of us—the fact that when Dian was upset about Bjonn's initial proposition, it was Tucker (who has his office a thousand miles away) I found with her, in her office... She should have contacted *me*—it was my case. She should've left a message with me, one I'd have gotten upon awaking. Instead she called Tucker, brought him east on the run, and left the message in my office almost as an afterthought.

And then there was the way Tucker had called me, the next morning. He was still in Megayork—why? And how had he discovered Dian's disappearance so quickly? Had they made arrangements to meet—an arrangement she had not kept?

Had they met, clandestinely, before...? Could that explain the apparent lack of men in Dian's life? Had she been seeing her boss on the sly? Or was I starting to build something out of nothing?

Tucker's reaction at her disappearance—there was no mistaking that, now. He had betrayed more than just a superior's concern for an employee under him. If he hadn't punched so many of my own emotional buttons I would have instantly recognized that.

I brooded about that for some time. And

when Tucker brought in Ruth Polonyck, only lately removed from the Public Care rolls, it was a little more obvious to me that it might have been to someone else. This was Dian Knight all over again. Why, Ruth even *looked*, a little like Dian. Same pert little figure, same bouncy, exuberant personality. *Cute*—like Dian. Not as bright, maybe, but winsome.

So I sat back with a cynical smile and watched Tucker conduct a new protegee into the department. I sat back, and I watched, for the first month, brooding all the while.

Then I struck back. I began a deliberate campaign to take Ruth away from him.

During that first month a number of the men in our department made plays for Ruth. They rarely even got a first date. No one got a chance to encore. Looking for it, I found the whole pattern very obvious. She would go through the motions to a limited extent, but her interests were elsewhere. I knew where.

So I pitched my campaign differently. I found ways to include her in my routine assignments, ways which accented the (ho, ho) glamour of my job, and kept her out from under foot during the (more common) dull parts. I became a Fun Fellow To Be With, a fellow worker with whom she could share a sense of common adventure. We were Partners In Adversity.

Tucker lived in Great Lakes, and he had a family to look after. He couldn't drop in on Ruth every evening—not even, I decided, as often as once a week. She was chafing. Young, nubile, and Tucker had gotten her juices flowing ... it was inevitable that she would turn to me. At first I was the fill-in man. These days I suspected Tucker and I had reversed roles. I was her primary interest; Tucker was the fill-in.

It wasn't that I really enjoyed what I was doing that much. I felt a cynical pride in my

accomplishment—my way of striking back at The Old Man—but I didn't really *like* Ruth that well. The ease with which she had swallowed my line earned for her a certain measure of my contempt. She hadn't even any great loyalty to Tucker! But most important, every time I looked at her a certain way, if the light on her face was just right, I would see a subtle distortion of Dian's face. And that bothered me.

The party we were going to on this particular night was in a luxury tower in Old Manhattan, down near the tip of the island. The lift ran up the outside of one sheer wall, and the illusion of open space as the city dropped away beneath us was enough to keep Ruth clinging to me all the way up. I wished she wouldn't.

We got off at the 201st floor, most of which belonged to our hostess, Elvira Moore-Williams. She had inherited the largest single share of one of the big private corporations—I don't remember which, and I doubt she does either—and bringing Ruth to her party had been my master-stroke. I knew it would get back to Tucker.

"Oh my God," Ruth whispered to me as we waited under the door-scanner, "I never thought I'd be able to walk off. Promise me, please, you won't take me back down in that thing!"

I was saved the necessity of a reply by the opening of the doors. A long, sensual-looking woman stood at one side, a handsome freak with oiled muscles on the other. The woman rubbed her bare belly up and down my hip and thigh, squeezed my arm between her nubbin-like breasts, and breathed, huskily, "I'm Veronica. Please come in."

Ruth, I saw, was receiving similar attentions from the muscle freak, so I abandoned her to her own delights, such as they might be.

Some mildly halucinogenic gas—perhaps

nitrous oxide—was being circulated through the air-conditioning system, and I found myself laughing with Veronica as we strolled into one of the main rooms. She had her hand under my loin-cloth and was kneading my buttocks. "I like the feel of the way they move when you walk," she told me.

"Are you an official greeter?" I managed to ask.

She shook her head. "Haven't you been to Elvira's parties before?" she parried.

I found myself replying in doleful tones. "No," I said, genuinely sad, "I have not been to one of Elvira's parties before."

"Don't cry, dear man. Think how delightful it is that you are here now."

"Yes," I said, immediately brightening, "that's true, isn't it?"

"Elvira likes to be happy," Veronica said. "So she tries to surround herself with happy people. Isn't that lovely? I'm a cat," she added. "Purrrr." She rubbed herself up and down my side again. "Are you a tom?"

"I'm sorry," I said. "I'm a Tad."

"Oh... Are you really? Perhaps I'd better keep looking, then." And without another word she moved away, leaving me alone in the swirling mass of laughing people.

I'd heard about Elvira Moore-Williams' parties, but never any details. It had taken me two months to wrangle an invitation, and I had stooped to some politicking of my own to accomplish it. The very pink of fashion, they were, and, I'd been told, a complete world of their own. Now that I was here, I found that easy to understand.

I moved through the people, drifting aimlessly, no real thoughts in my mind—what thoughts I had were curiously elusive—simply wandering, exploring, from room to room. There were people everywhere, most of them fashionably unclothed, some of them doing things which might have shocked or fascinated me

on another occasion. But somehow I didn't care just now. I heard the sounds around me as if from down a long and echoing tunnel, a sort of whirling, cycle of repetition imposing itself in a pattern over what I could hear. I recall thinking that time was collapsing, condensing, closing in around me, contracting so that my past and future were both rushing at me simultaneously and—

I groped with my hand on a door-button, it slid open, and I fell inside, into an eating cubical. I let the doors shut without finding the light, and fell forward, my mouth over the evacuation unit, and vomited.

After that I felt a little better, but still unsteady. Everything still seemed to be on a great carousel, moving with ponderous speed past a brass ring. Each time I passed the ring I would reach for it, and one new sound, one new thought, or one new sensation would be added to the overlapping patterns of previous sounds, thoughts, and sensations, still reverberating in my skull. I didn't like it.

Somehow I found the light and turned it on. The universe steadied for a moment. Then I saw that I was not in a normal eating cubical at all. I was in a cubical equipped for two.

I almost threw up again.

I staggered, and sat down, sitting, inevitably, on the other evacuation unit. I heard myself giggle. "Hey, Dian," I said out loud. "Having a wonderful time. Wish you were here." Without thinking, I fitted the meal tube to my mouth. It felt wrong, tasted wrong. I dialed a flavor which would change the taste of bile in my mouth. I almost choked, laughing, while I ate.

When I was a little boy, I always wondered what it was like in a *girl's* eating cubical. I knew what it was like in mine—and in the others of boys I knew. But there was something mysteriously and

subtly *different* about girls, and I knew it even then. I knew their plumbing was different, and while I hadn't associated it with sex (well, not with the kind of sex an adult thinks about), I had already figured that their evacuation processes must be different than mine. Ergo, they would use different equipment, a differently designed evacuation unit. But *how* would it be different? I tried to work it out in my mind, but it was simply beyond my knowledge. My imagination could not cope with it. But I was terribly curious.

One day, early in First Form, I saw a girl use an eating cubical. That is, I saw her go into one, and, later, come out of it again, tugging at her clothing and licking her lips. I was stunned, because *I had used that cubical myself*.

That was a day of great disillusionment for me. That was the day I learned that girls used the same exact cubicals boys did—that the cubicals at least observed no difference in the sexes. But my old curiosity lingered on. I knew better, but I still wondered ... could there *be* girls-only cubicals—and even if there weren't, what would they be like if there *were* such cubicals? Had there *once* been separate cubicals for girls? And so on, for the next few years. Then, gradually, I forgot about it. Every once in a long while the old fantasy would return, fleetingly, and I'd ponder the question for a moment before I recalled that I knew the answers, and the answers were prosaic and without consequence.

Now, sitting in a cubical built for two, that old riddle came back to me, in a shockingly new form: what would a cubical be like for two people doing it *together*? I had never thought about that one, but here was the answer—and again a bit prosaic, if still shocking to one of my morals in its implications: it was simply like one cubical with twice the space and double the usual

facilities. In my bemused and light-headed state it seemed to me that I was finding answers to questions I had not posed, and that this was a fact of some significance or portent. I wanted to share my sudden knowledge with someone—and in that moment I realized that there was only one person I had any desire to tell it to. Dian.

Damn it all, anyway.

When I came out of the cubical, I found Veronica waiting for me. "My, but you were in there a long time," she cooed. "But—alone?"

I started to reply, but a man materialized out of the shadows and elbowed me aside. She disappeared into the cubical after him. I stared at the closed door for a while, wishing that I was somewhere else, where I could *think*.

"Tad!"

I turned, and there was Ruth. She had less on than she'd worn in the front door, and that left very little indeed.

"Oh," she said, getting a grip on my arm and going limp against me, "I'm so woozy. But, wowie, I'm having so much fun..."

"I'm glad to hear that," I said. I could taste the word *liar* right on the tip of my tongue, but I don't believe I said it aloud, because she took no notice of it. "What happened to Muscles?" I inquired.

"Who?" she asked. She looked up into my face and her eyes wavered, and then crossed and uncrossed.

"The guy at the door," I amplified.

"The door..." she repeated. "Which door? The one in the floor or the door in the door—?" She interrupted herself with laughter.

"Ruth," I said.

"What?" she said, happily.

I was going to say, *You're a drag*. But I didn't. I didn't know what to say. So I said, "There's an eating cubical right over

there." I pointed. "There are two people in it right now," I added. At that moment I was simply imparting a handy piece of information. I could as easily have said, "It's raining outside."

"Ohhh," Ruth said. "This is a *naughty* place, isn't it?"

"This is how *The Other Half* lives," I told her, smugly.

"Which Half is that?"

"What do you mean, which Half?"

"Well, like, is it the Other Half from *us*, or is it—I mean, which Half are *we*, anyway, for it to be the *Other* Half of?"

"Huh?" I replied.

"Well, you asked me—I mean, you *told* me... Well, there was *something* about this Other Half..."

"Of what?" I asked.

"That's what I—"

"What are we talking about?"

"I thought *you* knew."

"I can't think straight," I told her. "Can you?"

"No," she said giggling. "*Of course* not."

"Well, all *right* then."

"I'll see you later," she said. And the next moment she was lurching off into another room, leaving me still standing in the hall, outside the Eating Cubical Built For Two. I decided I'd see me later too, and wandered off in another direction.

As I entered the room—it was the room I'd wandered off into—I heard a burst of laughter from a group of people across on the other side. "*That's* the Other Half," I said under my breath and mostly just to myself, although a couple of people on the floor whom I was at that moment stepping over did give me funny looks.

As I crossed the room toward them, the group laughed again. When I got closer, I saw that some of them weren't real.

They were watching a life-size 3-D. I didn't realize the fact until several of the

people among the group flickered, vanished, and were replaced by others. The sound was off, and they were simply watching the soundless antics of the 3-D holograms. Every so often, one of the voiceless images would do something completely absurd, pulling an extravagant face, or suddenly whirling about or the like, no doubt responding to some unseen voice or sound-effect, and everyone would laugh uproariously. It was like watching and laughing at the antics of a bewildered blind man, but it *was* occasionally funny.

I laughed too, especially at the sight of the new images—three people, a man and two girls, all dressed in outlandish costumes and giving each other the most pigheadedly infatuated looks.

Then something about those images jarred me for a moment from my gibbering idiocy: *the man was Bjonn*. And the girl on his right—it *was Dian!*

CHAPTER ELEVEN

I AWOKE TO the discomfitting knowledge that someone else was in my bed. The room was very dark, and I couldn't see. At first I wondered where I was, and thought perhaps I was in a strange bed. Then, as my exploring fingers slid over the smooth warm flesh that bulked next to me and I heard a female sigh, I found my memories returning to the events of the party.

Someone had pressed an injectab against my buttock—I'd thought at first it was a stray caress until the sudden freezing sensation reached me—and whatever it had been, it wiped all cares from my mind, completing the job the gas in the air had only begun.

I was still quite dispassionately aware that the two people for whom I'd so futilely searched were cavorting before me in holographic replica, but the knowledge no longer sent jolts of adrenalin through my system. The urgency I'd felt only moments before was gone, dissolved into a spreading sea of bliss.

My own experiences with drugs had been rare. I was even—I must admit it—naïve about their use by the upper classes. I have no idea what sort of drug was injected into me—or even its relative strength or commonly defined properties. I know only that its effect upon me was to divorce my conscious mind from the more primal part of me, to subdue my conscious mind into a sort of blase spectator, and to allow my animal instincts their full flowering. Standing there, watching Dian and Bjonn in their strange pantomimes, laughing as the crowd laughed, I experienced a sudden, unexpected and entirely spontaneous physical orgasm, which caught me completely by surprise.

I was shaken by the experience, but filled with a vast sense of wonder and delight. I felt full of Satyr-like powee, elemental a rutting, strutting beast. And the distant *me* could only look on with wide-eyed amazement.

At this point my memories become fragmented. I have lost the sequence of their proper order. But I recall finding the lithe and feline Veronica and dragging her to the floor on that very spot—to which she resisted not at all.

I remember too—I wish I could be certain it was real, and not a later dream, but I remember some of those too—I remember putting on an exhibition with an extraordinarily talented woman before admiring party-goers, and only afterwards discovering she had been my hostess, Miss Moore-Williams.

And finally—this is somewhat clearer—I remember the tearstained face of Ruth Polonyck and her pleading voice as she implored me to take her away from there, to put my clothes on and *please* let's go now—!

We took a pod all the way to Vermont—and I later received the credit statement to verify that fact. A blatantly expensive thing to do, and not at all my habit.

The girl made another sound and I leaned closer, peering at her in the darkness. She must have felt my heavy breath upon her face, for she gasped and then spoke.

"Tad—is that you?"

"Yes, Ruth," I said. I put my hand on her belly and let it slowly slide down over the outside of her hip and thigh.

"Ohhh ... that feels nice," she said. "Do me some more."

I did. She sighed a little, moaned a little, and then reached for me with hungry arms. She was easy to satisfy, as I'd known she would be. Afterwards, when I had stopped moving, she giggled.

"Why are you giggling?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't know," she said, her voice coy. "I guess I was just thinking about the party. You know, I've never been to a party like that. Before, I mean."

"Yeah," I said, feeling withdrawn and distant. "Me neither."

"Does that ... sort of thing ... go on all the time?" she asked.

"I wouldn't know," I said. "Perhaps."

"What are you thinking?" she asked dreamily.

"Nothing," I said. I was thinking of Dian.

"Will you take me there again?"

I rolled over onto my back. "No," I said.

"Why?" She was disappointed.

"I didn't care for it," I said.

"I thought you were having a good time." A pouty voice.

"Somebody was having a good time," I agreed. "But it wasn't me." I'd been lost somewhere along the line.

"I liked it," she said. "I had fun."

"You would," I said.

"What?"

"Nothing." *It suits your mindlessness*, I said to myself.

"Maybe I'll ask someone else to take me," she said. "Next time."

"Who?" I asked, not really caring much any more. "Tucker?"

There was a period of silence. I was starting to drift off again when Ruth spoke: "Who told you about Tucker?" she said. Her voice sliced like fine old steel through my drowsiness.

"It wasn't hard to guess," I said, feeling obscurely pleased with myself.

"How do you mean?" she demanded, voice strident, fingers on my arm tense.

"Did you think you were his first?" I asked sleepily. *Go back to sleep and leave me alone*, I told her with my mind.

"Hey—you, Tad!" she said, shaking my shoulder. "You wake up. I want to know about this. You've got to tell me," she insisted.

"Figure it out for yourself," I snarled.

"Who'd you replace in the office?"

"That girl—who disappeared?"

"Dian Knight," I said. "That girl."

"What—what happened to her?"

"She disappeared," I said. "Until tonight." My stomach muscles clenched and knotted as I said that. "Until tonight..." I repeated.

"Tonight?"

"I saw her on the 3-D. In some crazy costume."

"What was she doing there?"

I jumped out of bed and groped my way into the other room, where I turned on a light near the infomat. Sitting down before the console, I started pushing buttons, a

sudden manic drive seizing me.

A few minutes later I had it all in front of me on a plastic printout sheet.

"What're you doing?" Ruth said.

I looked around. She was leaning against the doorway to the bedroom. Naked, her body looked too short, too chunky. Her waist was too thick, and her breasts, deprived of their undersupports, looked smaller and droopy. The purple rouge was gone from her nipples and her face had a puffy, unfinished look to it. Suddenly I was sick of her, sorry I'd ever gotten involved with her. Some prize! I'd have been smarter to let Tucker keep her for himself. The thought of her with Tucker cheered me a little—at that moment I felt truly superior to The Old Man. This sad creature was the best he could do for himself—and I'd even taken that away from him.

Something in my expression, in my lack of reply, must have frightened her. She suddenly retreated into my bedroom, and the door snicked shut. "I'm going home," came her muffled declaration.

"Fine," I said, and turned back to stare at the printout.

I expected repercussions.

I fully expected the infomat would roust me from my sleep again while Tucker once more chewed me out.

It didn't happen. Instead I awoke—this time to an empty bed, for which I was profoundly grateful—a few minutes before usual, while the windows were still dark. I snapped instantly awake, and quickly performed my morning ablutions, hurrying to be on my way to my office. I took the printout with me. If Tucker wasn't going to call me, I'd damned well call him!

I didn't see Ruth, and I didn't go looking for her. Instead, once in my office, I put through Tucker's office-code and sat back to see what would develop next.

I had to work up through his outer defenses, of course, but one secretary (homely, and approaching retirement age) and two assistants later, I was face to face with The Old Man.

He looked older. There was a sag in the skin around his jawline I hadn't noticed before. The weathered face had felt the first touch of winter. His drawl was tired.

"Have you talked with Ruth this morning?" I inquired, very chipper.

His eyes focused on mine and for a single moment I saw naked hate in them. He had talked with Ruth. "Had you something particular in mind," he asked, "or is this just a social call?"

I opened my mouth and he added, "If it is, I'd like to remind you that this is an open line and I have a busy office."

You bastard, I thought. That didn't stop you when you wanted to ride my back! "I thought she'd be talking with you," I said, keeping my voice cheerful. "I knew you'd be the first to hear the good news."

That hooked him!

His expression grew more tired, even sadder. "You've called to gloat," he said. "I see."

"I'm afraid I don't get you, sir," I said. "I thought you'd be pleased."

"Listen, you vicious little—!"

I put on a shocked face. "Sir!" I said. "Please! What are you saying?"

"What I'm saying is that I intend to—"

"Sir, I'm afraid we've lost communications," I said, frostily. "*This* is the purpose of my call." I held up the printout. "I have no idea what you have in mind, but I shall terminate this call and wait for you to digest the content of the information I've relayed." (He would be punching for a printout copy of the sheet I'd displayed right now. I saw his eyes track down to his console just as I disconnected.)

It had been a typical public 3-D show

called *All Around Town*. The basic format was to present amusing oddities for public titillation while the show's host, Genial Gene, made nasty remarks about his subjects. One of the particular subjects of last night's show was the founding of a new religion, the Church of the Brotherhood of Life. Brother Bjonn, Sister Dian and Sister Rachel had appeared to attempt to describe their Life while Genial Gene hogged the soundtrack to heckle them. The party-goers had been right: it was better with the sound off. I had watched a complete recording of that segment, and had made a printout of what little information I could glean from it.

It had given me real—if fleeting—pleasure to toy with Tucker the way I had, but as I waited for him to return my call I became increasingly apprehensive. I'd stirred him up. I'd done a nice job of covering for myself—a rerun of our entire conversation wouldn't provide him with the slightest grounds for complaint—but we both knew what lay at the root of our little joust, and we both knew that this would hardly be our final round.

I'd just made myself a real enemy.

The infomat buzzed, and Tucker's face flashed on the screen again. "How does Miss Polonyck enter into this?" he asked.

I had to shift gears. "Ahh, we were both at the same party when I saw the, ahh, 3-D show. I, ummm, told her about it afterwards. I, well, I assumed she would tell you if she spoke with you, sir," I said. I was Johnny Humble.

"I see," he said. He didn't mention Ruth again.

"It's a real break," I said. "They're out in the open again. It would be no trouble to track them down now."

"And you want to do that, do you?" Tucker asked.

"I'd like to, yes," I said.

"They're still out on the west coast," he

said, pensively.

"Yes sir."

"And you want to go out there."

"Yes sir."

"The warrants are null and void," he said. "They expired. I doubt we could get fresh ones. What would you do?"

"Talk to them. Find out just exactly what happened. What really happened, I mean. Find out what's behind this phony religion they're starting up. Get some kind of picture of what's going on." I felt myself tensing and untensing while I wondered what form his revenge would take. Would he say no, simply to chasten me? Or might he send me out, hoping to get me out of his hair with Ruth for a while? I wanted to tell him he could have her, with my blessings, but I didn't dare.

"Any reason why a local man on the coast couldn't do that?"

"I know the situation better," I said.

"Ummm," he said, cupping his chin with one hand and absently stroking his jawl. "Very well, then. Go." The screen blanked out.

The "Church" had its headquarters near a sleepy little town in northern California called Cloverdale. To reach it I took an HST to Oakland, and a tube to Santa Rosa, which is as far north as the tube goes. There I rented another car—they hadn't said I couldn't, when I'd received my cost-clearance for the trip—for the drive north of Bay Complex.

North of Santa Rosa the city drops away almost immediately, and the road begins climbing. This was an automatic road, and a far cry from the old Coast Road on which I'd last driven. As we went up into the hills I looked back down into the city and saw that it was one long finger that extended up the Napa Valley from the south, tapering almost to a point that terminated with Santa Rosa.

Unlike the other megacities I'd seen, however, Bay Complex did not flow over every natural formation of land like an inexorable tide. Here and there strong greens still thrust up into the cold damp air, and most of the valley itself was rich with the vineyards and orchards for which it was centuries-famous.

It wasn't a long trip. Soon I was heading the car down an exit-ramp from the roadway and into Cloverdale itself.

There wasn't much to see. Tree-shaded streets. A few local shops—most needs could be taken care of in the city—and here and there low (less than twenty-story) coops interspersed among older dwellings. Despite its closeness to Bay Complex, the town had a smugly rural feel to it. I cruised along the main street, past four blocks of commercial shops, an entertainment palace, three resort hotels, looking for some sign of the "Church" I wanted, without luck. Finally I turned around and headed back, stopping at the local fire-control station.

A raw-looking youth looked up from behind a desk half-hidden by consoles. "What can I do you for?" he asked, grinning.

"I'm looking for a group of people," I said. "I thought somebody here might know of them."

"You're an easterner, aren't'cha?" he said.

I nodded.

"Thought so. Who you looking for?"

"Group calls itself 'the Church of the Brotherhood of Life,'" I replied. "Saw something about them on 3-D last night."

"Come all the way out here to join up, did'ja?"

"You know where I can find them?"

"Yeah, you just—wait a minute. Got a fire to take care of."

Something had lit up on his console; I couldn't see it from where I was standing.

His hands flew over the keys of the console with practiced fluidity, faster than I could follow. There was a traditional blast from a siren somewhere outside and above us, and then I heard the shriek of turbines revving up.

"You wanta watch?" the kid asked. "Come on over here." I followed him over to a bank of screens which were apparently monitors. He punched a couple of buttons and several screens came alive.

One showed the interior of a garage. Just as I'd realized what I was looking at, the picture zoomed up on the garage entrance and swerved out onto the street. I thought I recognized the car parked at the opposite curb, and I turned to look out the front window of the fire-control office just as a big red truck swung past, obliterating every view but that of its side—a mass of articulated machinery. The other screens showed bits of sky and trees, a blur of shopfronts and sidestreets, and even the pavement of the street flashing by. It was obvious that all the broadcasts originated from the big truck.

The kid gestured at the screens. "This is just for my amusement, really. So's I won't get too bored in here."

"They monitor the fire-fighters?" I asked.

"In a manner of speaking, they do," he agreed. "Whole truck is remote-controlled by our boys up in Ukiah at Fire-Control Central for this area."

We watched the monitors as the big robotruck careened along some back road towards a reported fire. "Uh, listen..." I said. "Any chance you could tell me—?"

"Oh yeah—that church group," he said. His eyes never left the monitors. He had a greedy expression on his face. "You go on through town—north, that is—on the old road, the street out front, you know? About two miles out you'll see this big old house

up on a hill; that's it."

"Any way I can know for certain that's the house when I see it?"

"Only one around for miles that old, that big," he said. "Can't miss it. Local landmark. Old Benford House—ask anybody."

I thanked him and went out. The last I saw, in one final glance over my shoulder, he was still plastered to those monitors. *Have a nice fire*, I thought, as I climbed back into my car.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

HE WAS RIGHT: I didn't miss it. The house belonged to another century. Vast, rambling, many-winged, it was a monument to some long-dead owner's vast ambition and lamentable taste. It stuck up on the hillside like a sore thumb.

I had to park the car down on the road; there was only a narrow, winding white gravel pathway leading up the hill.

Someone had recently planted shrubs along the path, and some were late-bloomers, showing tiny star-like blossoms. The path twisted back and forth among these shrubs, forcing one to a slower pace and probably adding fifty-percent to the length of the hike. The sun had broken through the overcast and the back of my shoulders grew hot. Small insects, no doubt attracted by my sweat, buzzed around my head and kept striking my face and neck. I slapped at them, but without diminishing

their number greatly.

"Hello, there."

I raised my eyes from the path and saw a young man sitting on a bench that had been placed among the shrubbery. He was small, features close-set, hair very dark and skin quite light. He returned my stare and as our eyes locked I felt my old avatic hair-bristling response. *This man was one of them*. It was there in the way he held himself, the way he spoke, the way his eyes rested so calmly, so certainly on mine.

"I'm here looking for a couple of people I know," I said. He smiled and rose to his feet and I wondered why I had immediately felt so defensive in his presence.

"Certainly," he said. "Won't you come up to the house? I'm sure they would be pleased to see you." He didn't ask me who I had meant.

As I trudged the gravel path behind my guide, now and then giving my neck a random slap, I asked myself just exactly what I hoped to accomplish by this confrontation. It had been three months since I had last seen Dian and Bjonn, although I'd hounded after them for days afterwards. I had nothing concrete to say to them, and not much I could threaten them with. What was the point of it all? Was it just that I couldn't let it go without seeing them again, without talking to them one last time? As we approached the big house I felt the muscles of my stomach tense and a small knot of pain begin to spread through my abdomen.

The young man ushered me in through the door and a wave of cool darkness washed over me. For a moment I imagined I really stood in an ancient church, a place of vaulting ceilings and stained glass windows, all silence and majesty. In actuality I was in a vestibule, rich with stained wood panelling, flanked by massive inward-hinged doors and leading through an

archway into a large room.

The room beyond enhanced the feeling. The ceiling was not high, but its white stucco was crossed by heavy beams of dark wood, the walls were wainscotted in more dark panelling, the windows set above the wainscoting fitted with leaded glass. The floor was bare of furniture, only a richly hued rug at its center, and a few cushions scattered about. Dian was sitting on one of the cushions, facing me. She was the only person in the room.

"Tad," she exclaimed executing an intricate maneuver that put her on her feet. She crossed the room toward me—I still stood near the door—her hands extended to me. "How wonderful to see you here," she said.

I looked around, but the young man who had brought me here had vanished. The room was dry and cool, but I felt sweat running down my back.

Dian's toga-like robes swirled about her as she moved and she had an ethereal presence, almost as if floating, gliding above the floor. Her hair was its natural color and it formed a halo about her face. Her smile lit her face like a torch.

I couldn't keep my eyes on her. "Hello, Dian," I said, moving to one side to evade her touch. "Where's Bjonn?" I asked. I turned away from her and walked over to a window.

"He's here," she said, and her voice lost its first glow of warmth. "Would you like to see him?"

"Yes," I said, keeping my back to her. I stared through the window, but in my mind I still saw Dian. I wanted to crouch over to diminish the pain in my gut. As I heard her move away, I slipped my hand over my belly. It didn't help.

No time seemed to pass, but suddenly I was aware that someone had entered the room behind me.

"Tad," came Bjonn's resonant voice. "Will you tell us what brings you here?"

I turned at last and saw him in the shadows of the opposite side of the room. Dian stood next to him, her tiny figure somehow no longer dwarfed by his. Bjonn was also in robes.

"I saw you on 3-D," I said.

"And so—?" he probed gently.

"I came out here to see you," I said.

"As now you do," Bjonn replied. "But surely you did not travel all this distance merely to confirm the sight of us you beheld on 3-D?"

"No," I said, trying to put steel into my voice. "No, I came out here to get a few answers from you."

"Ah!" he laughed warmly. "Bravely put. I had not expected it. We should be pleased indeed to share our answers with you."

Something twisted in my stomach and I felt my knees shake. "I think you're deliberately misunderstanding me," I told them. "You're evading the subject."

"What subject?" Bjonn asked.

"The subject of—look! Are you aware of the mess your disappearance caused? Why the hell did you run out like that? What led you out here to, to this Godforsaken place?" I waved my hand at the window. "What—what're you up to out here?" I felt my voice dissolve and with it some of my anger. "Just tell me what's going on, will you?"

"Tad—" Dian, solicitously— "is something wrong? You look ill."

I swayed, dizzily. "I—could you?—an eating cubical?"

I wasn't aware of him crossing the room, but suddenly Bjonn was at my side, holding my arm, supporting me. I felt a cold sweat cover my face. "We have no eating cubicals here," he said.

I fainted.

They revived me only second later. I was

sitting, propped, on cushions, Bjonn still holding me. Dian held something sharp and acrid smelling under my nose.

"There," she was saying, "does that help? Are you feeling any better?"

"That stuff..." I said. "It gives me ... a headache."

"All right; we won't use it any more," she said, doing something with it that removed the smell. She was using a tone of voice on me which I recognized. My den mothers used to talk that way to me.

"Lean forward," Bjonn suggested. "Put your head between your knees. It will help."

"The sun..." I said, doing as he said, "climbing up that hill..."

"I can understand," he said soothingly. "You'll get over it."

But I still felt sick to my stomach.

"Why are you so concerned about us?" Bjonn asked, after I felt well enough to sit up and talk. He sat facing me on another cushion. Dian had disappeared into another room. I'd seen no one else.

"In case you've forgotten," I pointed out, "you're my responsibility."

"Nonsense," he smiled. "I am my own responsibility."

"It's my *job*," I insisted. "I was responsible for you."

"I'm afraid," he countered, "that I have been responsible for you. I apologize to you."

"Why'd you run away?" I asked.

"We didn't," he said.

I sat there and glared at him, while he smiled in return. I wanted to get up and hit him. I'd never hit another man in my adult life. But at the thought the pain in my gut redoubled. I leaned over a little more, clenching my stomach a little tighter, and gritted out:

"Let's not quibble over words. You ran.

You grabbed Dian, made the 21:00 HST to Pacifica, took a tube to Santa Barbara, rented a tandem cycle, and hunted down a man named Linebarger, spent the night as his guests, and the next day the four of you—you, Dian, Linebarger and a girl named Mills—took a tube north, rented a car, and drove it as far as Big Sur, where you turned the car over to a kid named Leroy Tanner, and then you dropped out of sight—the four of you—until now. Until last night. On 3-D. Why? Just tell me that, will you? Let me close the damned books on you, huh? Tell me why!"

He waited me out. Then he nodded, slowly. "You've compiled an interesting dossier on our activities, haven't you? None too detailed, but in keeping with your dark suspicions. 'On the run,' I believe you put it. I 'grabbed' Dian. We 'hunted down' Bob Linebarger and 'a girl named Mills'. We 'dropped out of sight,' you say. I can understand why you feel that way, Tad, but it isn't true. None of it's true."

He raised a hand to forestall my angry interjection. "Oh, I'm sure you have the bald facts," he said. "But a collection of facts is in itself no guarantee of truth. The omission of a fact can certainly cast other facts into a different shade entirely. Would you like the truth?"

"That's what I'm here for," I said flatly.

"I see. You *think* you're here for the truth. But are you? If it contradicts what you think—what you believe? Will you still want the truth then?"

"Look, Bjonn," I said. "It would be a pleasure—a distinct pleasure!—to hear just a little straight talk from you. Yes, *I'd like the truth!*"

"Very well," he nodded, Buddha-like in the shadows.

"To begin with, Dian and I did not 'run away,' as you seem to believe. After Dian had confided to me the truth of your

assignment it seemed to us both that the necessity of our mission demanded a less hostile setting. Dian knew that a friend of hers was vacationing in Santa Barbara and we determined to visit her."

"Her?" I interjected.

"Karlin Mills," Bjonn said.

"This was in the afternoon of that day," he continued. "We wanted you to join us, but Dian feared you would not—that you would attempt to stop us if you could. I confess she understood you better than I. It was her plan—it struck me then as a pointless stratagem—to visit her roommate and switch credit cards with her. It would gain us credit, she told me, if you tried to have ours stopped. Which you did." His gaze seemed accusing.

"She committed a crime," I said.

"The card she exchanged for her roommate's was far more valuable than the one she took," Bjonn replied. "This may be a crime by your standards, but I find your standards irrational.

"In any case, we next arranged to meet you to ask you to join us. Your answer was to flee in blind panic. Whereupon we simply proceeded without you. We went to Santa Barbara in the manner you discovered, found Miss Mills without difficulty, joined her and her friend, Bob Linebarger, and shared our sacrament with them. Then we spent a peaceful night, arose the next day to travel about the town for a short spell—it seemed a shame not to enjoy so beautiful a place for at least a little while—and then, since that was to be our companions' last day in Santa Barbara—that had been the reason for our haste, you know; Dian knew they would be moving on the next day and she had no further address for them—we simply moved on with them. We drove up to Big Sur, where Bob had friends. Bob made arrangements to return the car, and we spent the next month in Big Sur,

meeting many wonderful people and sharing our life-sacrament with them. One of them owned this beautiful old house, and he gave it to us, so we came up here. And here we have been ever since. Never hidden, never 'out of sight,' Tad, and never unavailable to those who seek us. To be truthful with you, Tad, I had not expected to see you among them."

"You were in Big Sur a month, you say," I repeated, tasting the gall I'd swallowed when Tucker had ignored my suggestion and all but told me I was a fool for thinking they were still there. A full month! We'd have routed them in less than a week. In one part of my mind I was already composing a memo to Tucker, a memo that would resonate with the full tones of my indignation.

Bjonn was nodding again. His expression was strangely sad. "That is the truth, Tad. Can you accept it?"

"Accept what?"

"That you have fabricated a pair of fugitives in the dark recesses of your mind—that no one was fleeing you, no one was trying to evade you—that we have been in the open all the while."

"But carefully avoiding the use of your credit—or any other tip-off to your movements, your whereabouts," I suggested cynically.

He shook his head. "You cut off our credit, Tad. Do you think we had any choice?"

I stood up. The pain had subsided a little. "Who owns this place?" I asked. "Is he here?"

"No," Bjonn replied. "What do you wish to know?"

"I'm just wondering if he knows what's going on here."

"He knows. He is one of us."

This time I sought out Bjonn's eyes. They seemed full of pale blue electricity. "One of

you," I repeated. "You haven't told me about that. About your crazy religion. About the—the *difference* between you and your, ah, converts and normal people. You haven't told me the whole truth. You've left out a few facts yourself."

The sadness seemed to fill his eyes and I couldn't look at him any longer. His voice seemed haunted with melancholy, when he spoke. "Your heart is so filled with hatred, fear and vituperation. Tad Dameron. Have you no room for your own feelings?"

I looked back at him and smiled, and it was my own smile and not one of his sickly saccharine creations. "Indeed I have, Bjonn; and my feelings have warned me about you from the start."

He came to his feet then, towering up over me, and I thought he was angry until he spoke.

"I think you'd best go now, Tad," he said. His voice was very quiet.

"You won't tell me any more?"

"No."

"You won't tell me about this religion-gimmick of yours?"

"No. If you were to share our sacrament, you would learn of it. There is no other way. And you are not yet ready."

"What's this 'sacrament'? What would I have to do?"

"You'd have to eat with us, Tad," he said, and at that moment it seemed to me that his words were tinged with almost curdling pity.

"A neat trick," I said. "You've all but talked me into it. I'll say goodbye." My legs were stiff and aching, and my stomach still uneasy, but I went quickly towards the outer door.

It *was* a neat trick. He'd trapped my curiosity, built my desire to know, my *need* to know almost to the point beyond which I would have succumbed. Almost, he had

succeeded in seducing me to his proposition.

When they'd first put it to me, this idea of sharing a meal together, I'd been purely and simply revolted by it. Now it was no longer a matter of my revulsion to the basic idea—I was more than certain that when Bjonn *shared a meal* with someone, when he administered his "sacrament," he was inducing that person into a transformation of some sort. I could not distrust my senses to that extent. I *knew* that every person Bjonn had touched, he had corrupted into something like himself. And every person he had corrupted had become his follower. It was subtle, insidious. But it was as I'd first believed: he was a point of contagion.

He spoke of being "in the open," as though he actually had been. And all the while he had been bent on giving his "sacrament" to as many as he could, converting them into followers, into a buffer ring around him, capable of protecting him, certainly shielding him, donating their credit to him, ultimately giving him this house and grounds in all its isolation, all designed to shelter him until he had sufficient power to come out into the open—as he had done at last, on the 3-D.

Sufficient power to come out into the open ... for what...? What was his ultimate purpose? Just what was his "mission" here on Earth?

I felt a chill run down my spine as I stepped out into the afternoon sun. He *was* accomplishing *something* in this subtle expansion of influence over the people around him. He was demonstrably *changing* them.

As I strode down the path to my car, I found a girl, robed in the now-familiar uniform, staring at a flower on one of the bushes. She looked up at me, smiled, seemed to take in from my expression a clue to my intent, and let her smile slip.

He was *changing* people, in some specific way. I decided it was time to see if the method or the result of that change could be scientifically established.

"You," I said to the girl. "You belong to this, ah, church?"

The answer was recorded plainly upon her. She nodded, wordlessly.

"You're coming with me," I said, and I seized her wrist and pulled her down the hill after me.

No one saw us. No one stopped me.

But all the way down to Santa Rose, she regarded me with sad and compassionately knowing eyes.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

I TOOK THE GIRL—her name was Lora—into our Bay Complex office. I'd called ahead; they were expecting me. I led her in to an unused room and told her to sit.

"There are two ways we can do this," I told her. "We can take you apart, muscle filament by muscle filament, until we have you laid out all over a laboratory. Or you can tell us what you know about the changes your, umm, sacrament brought about in you."

"Why have you waited until now to tell me this?" she asked. "Is it because you feel more safe here?"

Every time I spoke with one of these people, I ran into the same disconcerting feeling that we could only talk at cross-purposes. I wanted to slap the girl. Perhaps it showed; she shrank back from me. "All right," I said, turning my back on her and pacing across the short floor to the opposite wall, turning, and pacing back. "We'll take you apart, then."

"You can't," she said. "I am aware of my

rights. As a matter of fact, I am a Lawyer, Class D, and I am licensed to practice before the bar in Bay Complex." She gave me a sweet smile. "My license number is A2MHX-6910CK-alpha-alpha," she added. "This is an office of the Bureau of Non-Terran Affairs and can claim absolutely no jurisdiction over me."

At that I felt genuinely happy. I gave her my warmest smile. "Not directly over you, perhaps," I admitted, "but definitely over your body, which has been isolated for testing for suspected alien plague." I removed a printout sheet from my hip pouch and presented it to her. "This is an order, granted in Geneva, for the isolation and quarantine of your body"—I'd had her name filled in when I'd called in to make my initial report from Santa Rosa—"for the purposes of biological tests." I flourished the plastic sheet and then thrust it at her. I loved meeting lawyers.

She paled a little. But she accepted the sheet and read it thoroughly. At least she wasn't a bum lawyer. Finally, she looked up. "I can't tell you anything," she said. "Will you really have me destroyed?"

They took her to Lima, and I went back to Megayork. I had the flat feeling of anticlimax, of a confrontation that had somehow missed fire, aborted. When I replayed the events in my mind, when I dictated my prelims on them, I found them fuzzy, indistinct, and somehow unreal. When I tried to pin down a specific memory—what color was Dian's robe? Which direction did the windows of that church-like room face? How long had I actually spent in that house?—I found my thoughts squirming out from under my scrutiny. Had I succeeded in my specific mission? I felt I hadn't—and yet Tucker had been almost warm in his praise for me (a reflection, I was certain, of the praise he had received from *his* superiors). Sharp-eyed

young Level Seven Agent spots fugitives on 3-D show (who watches 3-D any more?) in new roles as religious leaders. Quietly pursues his mission to West Coast where he tracks them down to hillside retreat. Sure. I even kidnapped an innocent girl and turned her over to the X-T bio-labs. I must certainly be in line for a medal and a commendation. If not promotion.

I needed a break. I hadn't seen or spoken to Ruth since the night (morning?) she'd stormed out of my apt. And I had no real desire to. That ploy was finished, dead. It was stupid to begin with. But thinking about it started a chain of associations going...

I had to use a little push to get into the restricted part of Directory Assistance—first names aren't much to go on—but I got a make on Veronica. Her last name was Mullins. I suppose that explained her reluctance to use it.

She lived not a mile away from Dian's old residence, but, mercifully, much closer to the pod line. Her studio occupied the top three floors of another ancient building very much like the one in which Dian had lived. But at least this building had been modernized; the doors were new and slid back as I approached them, and the lift took me up to the tenth floor in about three heartbeats.

Veronica produced sensuals. The entire time I was in her studio I was aware of the vibrations overhead, and the impression of heavy machinery above me made me want to hunch in my shoulders and drop my head between them. I cannot understand why she chose to live on the lowest of her three floors instead of over her production plant, but it seemed of absolutely no concern to her, and she laughed the only time I mentioned it, waved her fingers distractedly, and dismissed the whole subject. I didn't bring

it up again.

"The whole private-enterprise thing is just a myth, you know," she told me almost immediately after I entered her apt. "Anybody can play—if you can supply something for which there's a demand."

"And there's a demand for you?"

"Always." She glanced upwards. "All twenty-four."

"Perhaps I should have subscribed, instead of coming here," I said.

"How did you find me?" she asked.

"Persistence," I said.

"How nice. And why?"

"I remembered you from Miss Moore-Williams' party."

She laughed. "You became quite the stud, I recall." She mock-pouted. "And you told me you weren't a tom."

"That was earlier," I said.

"—And then you weren't," she agreed. "Now...?"

"You intrigued me. I wasn't sure how much was memory and how much—"

She laughed. "Elvira's parties often produce that effect!"

"—how much I dreamed. I decided to check it out."

"You're very dogged."

An infomat buzzed and claimed her attention, so I turned slowly around, surveying the room she'd brought me into. It was long—perhaps the combination of two smaller rooms, the dividing wall taken out—and stylishly decorated with hue-shifting walls and the Roman-style couches which seemed to mark the latest fad among the well-to-do. The far end of the room was dominated by a life-sized pornographic hologram of my hostess, which invited my closer attention, and from which I quickly shifted my eyes. Instead I wandered over to one of the low couches and sat down on it.

A moment later she was back, dropping quickly to a seat beside me. "The one

drawback," she said lightly, "business. As long as I'm here, I have to put up with it." She sighed. "I go out often."

"Tell me something about yourself," I suggested.

"What's to tell?" She shrugged.

"You didn't always produce sensuels."

"No." She seemed to look inward for a moment. "But I try not to think about that."

"Oh."

"You're not really used to this sort of thing, are you?" she said.

"What do you mean?"

She smiled, self-deprecatingly. "The, oh, call it the life of the idle rich—even if I'm not exactly idle all the time."

"It's above my touch," I confessed. In point of actual fact, I had crossed a subtle but sharply defined class barrier—first in taking Ruth to the party, and again in coming here. It had seemed less so when I decided to come here, but that had been beforehand.

There is no law, no rule even, that says a man of my credit standing, a government employee, cannot enter the high-credit life. It is not even difficult, as far as the mechanics of it go. Class distinctions exist far more as attitude-barriers than anything else. To enter this world I had to cross over into a world of alien attitudes, of differing mores. It was uncomfortable. I felt like a fish out of water. These people did not think as I did. The gulf that separated us was the one most difficult to bridge. For most people the notion of crossing it was unthinkable. We tended to think of ourselves—each of us in his own class—as the only sort there was; we rarely even acknowledged the existence of other classes, either above or below us. Their thought-processes were too alien.

I rarely watch 3-D.

"It bothers you?" she asked. "Our life-

style?"

"I've never even subscribed to a sensual," I admitted.

"How would you like to make one?" A wicked smile teased the corners of her lips.

"Me?"

"I'll even give you a share of the royalties."

"What appeal would there be—for your customers?"

"Oh, novelty, perhaps..."

"I don't know..." I hesitated.

"Isn't that really what you came here for?"

"No—not to become a, a performer."

"We all perform; life is just one continuous show—*live and in solid color*, you know? Why not hook in to it?" She got to her feet and moved lithely across the room. Again my gaze was attracted to the hologram on the far wall. *Could I climb inside that hologram?*

She came back, something in her hand.

"Have you ever been outside yourself?" she asked. "Really outside, I mean?"

"That night at the party..." I said.

"That's not what I mean. Have you ever thought of making a sensual, and then *experiencing* it?" She leaned forward, lips pursed, and kissed me.

The shock of oral contact was like ice and fire, alternately scalding and numbing my nerve ends—I never even felt the injectab against my neck. She leaned back and smiled a lazy smile. "There," she said proudly. "Now I know you'll want to."

I shook my head a little stupidly. "I don't get you," I said. My lips felt puffy and slightly anesthetized; I had trouble speaking clearly through them.

She stood up again, her movements seeming jerky to me. "Come—on," she said. "This'll be—fun now."

Deep inside myself I wailed with self-pitying anguish. *What am I doing here?* my

buried mind screamed helplessly. *Why did I get into this? What's this woman doing to me?* But I climbed readily to my feet, feeling as if I was on a sudden swift lift that catapulted me into the air. Then I was dancing, feather-light, on the balls of my feet, frisking after Veronica, who beckoned and led me into another room.

It wasn't like the party. I wasn't disassociated from myself. My sensations seemed, if anything, more immediate, more acute. Reality was more *real*. But I had very little self-will; I initiated nothing.

I followed her into a small room where she was already disrobing. "Hey," I said, "I'm incompetent. You know that?"

"It's all right," she said. "Just take your things off."

I did, and then she began smearing a colorless but strong-smelling paste over my body, avoiding only my genitals and those areas where my body hair was thick. It was a highly gratifying sensation, and I became lost in it, only to be jerked back to awareness when I realized she had stopped.

She put me in a 'fresher then, removing the paste from my skin. This made no sense to me until I noticed that my body hair was now also gone. I realized the paste had been a depilatory, and I said, proudly, "Hey, that stuff took my hair off, right?"

"It'll grow back soon," she said. "You'll never miss it—and it won't really show."

I nodded in agreement. I was pleased with my powers of ratiocination.

She smeared a thin jelly over my smooth skin, and then had me don a very lightweight skin-tight suit of sorts, the crotch of which had been cut out. I expected her to attach connections of some sort to the suit, but she explained—very patiently—that the micro-sensing circuits of the suit included extremely short-range broadcast units and that wires or like that would only get in the way. "Here," she said.

"Let me test you." She ran one fingernail slowly down my left side, over my left nipple and across my hip. The suit transmitted the sensation to me like a second skin.

"The suit picks up what you do?" I asked.

She'd gone over to an inconspicuous console set in the wall of the room and appeared to be checking it. "No," she said over her shoulder, "it picks up what *you* experience. It's keyed into your nervous system. It plays back *everything* you experience, you know."

"Oh," I said happily. "Well, I'm ready to start experiencing now."

She laughed, an honest, open laugh. "All right," she said. "I guess we're all set."

Afterwards she let me experience the sensual. The drug had worn off by then, and I felt almost bitter with embarrassment.

"This will travel all over the world," I said.

"You should hope so," she said. "Think of what it'll do to your credit rating! You're a businessman now, you know."

"I could lose my job," I responded.

"I doubt it. The only way anyone could ever know it was you would be to ask me. And if I'm honest enough to give you royalties, you can trust me to keep your little secret safe."

I stared at her. "Have you any private feelings left?"

She tossed her head. "I don't know what you mean."

"You're a public commodity—for those who can afford you."

"So are you, now. Do you feel any different?"

"I don't know, yet. How can I tell?"

She shook her head. "Tad Dameron," she said. "You live in another world. Do you know that?"

"I'd just about figured it out," I said.

"You look wrung out," Ditmas told me the next day. He had the office cubical next to mine. He was just back from his accumulated six month vacation, and looking very fit. "You need to take some time off the job, fella."

I gave him one of my weaker smiles. "It's the off-the-job moments that leave me looking like this," I told him. I felt hollow and exhausted. I hadn't slept much that night, and my digestion was off.

He laughed, and popped back into his own office, no doubt convinced that I was living it up on my off-hours. Ruth had leaked the Word about the Moore-Williams party and it was common knowledge now. It didn't give me a whole lot of satisfaction to note that she was also a free agent these days, and spending her time with anyone who asked her. Tucker had let her go and probably realized himself to be well off by now.

I did routine work for the next few hours, and caught myself in only a dozen or less errors. I did a lot of intermittent staring out my window, but the sky was a leaden gray, the water of the Sound two shades darker, and the whole scene of no great emotional uplift.

Finally I did something I had been putting off for years. I made an appointment with a shrink.

Her office was furnished like a particularly homey apt, and I felt a sense of instant *deja vu* when I entered it. She was seated on a comfortable-looking couch, facing a second couch across a low table upon which a parasitic plant of some sort was growing. She was looking at a sheaf of printout sheets, and looked up almost guiltily when the door snicked shut behind me.

"Hello, there. You must be Tad," she

said. Her face was soft and warm, dominated by a large nose and two deep brown eyes, which regarded me a little quizzically. She'd had no cosmetic surgery, and her age showed, despite the current mode of her lightly silvered hair. "Won't you sit down," she added. "I'm afraid I was just checking out your file just now. I've been so rushed," she said apologetically.

I eased myself down onto the couch facing her. The cushions were hydraulic, and heated. They adjusted to my body and soothed some of the tensions from my muscles just as I sat there. She had returned to my file and was flipping quickly through the remaining sheets. I wondered what I was doing here and what I would say, but I did and said nothing.

She was a large woman, unabashedly matronly. Her clothing made no attempt to hide that fact. I found myself watching her hands as they flexed and gripped the plastic sheets: the play of muscles under the loosening skin, the furrows of tiring flesh, the age and the strength they showed in her. Long fingers, curiously graceful. One ring: a single platinum band; anachronistic. No timepiece on her fingers. She looked up again, and this time it seemed to me a little sharply.

"It took you a long time to come to me," she said. "Do you have any idea why?"

"I don't know why I'm here now," I admitted. "Why don't you tell me? You're the shrink."

"Shrink," she repeated. "Why do you call me that?"

"What else should I call you?" I asked. The couch was very warm, very comfortable. It nestled me.

"Why don't we be honest with each other," she suggested. "Why don't you just call me Mother?"

—To be concluded—

(Story Behind
the Cover)

BREAKING POINT

by WILLIAM C. JOHNSTONE



There are machines that ensure survival, and systems that ensure survival, but none of them will work unless the people they provide for wish to survive . . .

THE SHIP came out of Macro-Space into nothing but trouble. A ten-gram whisper of superconductive metal had inexplicably crystalized, and the control unit had shot an erratic directive to the power-core. Emergency controls had taken over then and kicked the ship out into ordinary space. Twenty nanoseconds later the power module was on a divergent course of its own, and the ship had already begun to break up.

Vana, Elton, Aaron and Chaimon knew nothing of this. Sealed neatly in their individual entropic chambers, they slept the Sleep Of The Long Moment that was intended to carry them across the stars as colonists to a new world. They were supercargo, transshipped in one of two thousand identical modules, each carrying its freight of four young, intelligent, physically fit, unmarried would-be colonists. The ship was built up of these two thousand modules, plus the dozen that provided for the needs of the crew, the power, and the control-center.

The ship had been bumped out of Macro-Space because it could not maintain speed without the power module, and without speed, could not maintain itself in that alternative to ordinary space where the speed of light was no longer a limiting factor. The ship broke up into its component modules because without power it was a derelict, but each module could, on its own, become an individually powered modular lifeship. Each module's four local inhabitants would go on sleeping the Sleep Of The Long Moment, unknowing, uncaring, until the moment when that particular module surfaced upon a planet its detectors showed to have a humanly liveable environment and a space-faring technology. Each module carried an inertial speed of just under light-speed, imparted to it by the original mother ship. Each module could maintain this speed indefinitely, and would, until such a planet were sighted and course suitably altered to reach it. And every module set out upon a separate, unique tangent to the ship's original course when breakup occurred.

The sleeping inhabitants of the lifeship modules—the freight—were lucky. They chanced survival. The ship's crew were not. Caught as they were in those brief nanoseconds after the alarm sounded, most of the crew found their narrow passageways dividing into the dark night of space. A few, in the self-sealing control and quarters modules, would be spared an instant death. They, instead, would live out the remainder of their lives in the immense void of ordinary space, waiting and hoping that somehow they might chance across a suitable planet within their meager lifetimes. The journey of a single day in Macro-Space is one of centuries in ordinary space. Those crewmen envied their brothers who had not been within a module when the ship had emerged.

Vana, Elton, Aaron and Chaimon were in Module 770. Crewman Dyker was in the passageway formed by one side of Module 770 in tandem with Module 771. Crewman Dyker was considered a rare item by his brothers, because he always followed the Code. The Code said to wear your space-gear when out in the passageways and not safely within a module. Crewman Dyker, alone of all the crew routinely patrolling the passageways, was wearing his space-gear. For that reason, he outlived the others by forty hours.

The instant the signal came through, his gear responded. His helmet erected itself and closed him within a self-sufficient environment. His hand, at that moment on one of the handbraces of Module 770, automatically locked into place. He was aware of a jerk which wrenched at his sanity, and then he was clinging to the side of a miniscule capsule in the black enormity of space. Staring wildly around him, he saw the pinpricks of light that were the other modules scattering out to lose themselves among the stars. He pulled himself up

against the lifeship module, and felt his suit lock itself firmly against its side. He had no idea of what had happened, and no way of knowing. He knew only that an emergency had occurred, that the ship had broken up into its component modules in response to that emergency, and that he, Crewman Dyker, had been the only member of the crew who had been prepared to survive that emergency because he had always obediently followed the Code.

Of course, the Code did not prepare him for what was to happen next.

The lifeship, responding to favorable data, had gone into a long, parabolic orbit which would swing it close by the fourth planet of the local star system. Because of its original position on the periphery of the starship, it alone had been flung into this immediate star system while the other modules, mechanisms unaware, overshot it and passed heedlessly by.

The lifeship made its calculations while still lighthours out, and began expending its available power on deceleration. It did not have a great deal of margin with which to play; it made use of the gravity wells of the two most convenient of the outer frozen giants in the system to slow itself. For Crewman Dyker, the experience was very close to that of his worst nightmares. Crewman Dyker was an unimaginative man as a rule; it must be said of him that he rarely dreamed vivid dreams, and his imagination had come into play only rarely, in his worst nightmares.

He survived the sudden swelling of two methane-banded disks to planets that filled his sky by the simple expedient of screwing his eyes tight shut, and somehow he did not fall into either one.

But when the lifeship made its first dip into the banshee scream of the fourth planet's molecule-thin upper atmosphere,

he realized his mistake. He was on the *outside* of the module. And this time the ship was going down.

Crewman Dyker was not given to many brave acts, nor was his last. Trembling, he triggered the release of the locking mechanisms which had held him against the lifeship's side, and began to grope for the next handhold forward. His only thought was to get inside. His last moment of awareness was that in which he was swept free of the module by the impact of hydrogen atoms at several thousand miles an hour. Hands outstretched in reflexive supplication, he fell back behind the ship. Soon after he was a bright cinder.

Aaron woke to the sounds of an argument.

He listened for a few moments without moving, trying to make sense out of it. The voices were strangely distant. All he could get from it was that two men were cursing each other. It didn't seem quite the right omen for the colonizing of a new world.

"Are you all right?" a female voice asked in his ear. He started at the sound, opened his eyes and saw a woman's face peering closely into his. Not a pretty face, certainly, but striking after its own fashion. He fitted face to name, summoning vestigial memories from before the single dream of the Sleep Of The Long Moment. The girl with the tight helmet of short straight hair, bright brass like an ancient battle helmet: Vana. He moistened his lips with his tongue. "Yes," he said.

The sharp planes of her face reshaped themselves, softening. "That's good," she said. "You had me worried. You took so long, coming out."

"I was listening," he said. It seemed an adequate explanation, to him.

"I'm surprised they signed you on," she said. "A little guy like you."

He sat up, feeling the chamber's

hydrobed flow under him. "I have my talents," he said. "They'll be able to use me."

"Not right now," she contradicted. "Not for now."

He took stock of their surroundings, then: the tight cramped quarters of the module, their four entropic chambers long bunk-like cylinders surrounded by the life-support equipment, Vana sitting on the open lip of the chamber opposite. He could still hear the voices of two men rising and falling in anger, but the module was empty. Then he took in the open door in the bulkhead, the door they'd sealed on liftoff somewhere long ago and far away, open now and aslant with thick yellow sunshine. He took a deep breath and then another, savoring the rich air and the subtle smells of growth and life that existed somewhere not far beyond that door. He grinned.

"We're here, huh?" he said, passing over Vana's cryptic statement for the nonce.

"No," she said. "We're not." And then she explained to him what little the lifeship module's instruments could tell them: the approximate location of the star-system in which they'd landed, and their approximate position on the world it had picked. "We're on the main continent of the southern hemisphere," she said, "and not more than two thousand miles from where we should be. According to the instruments, radiation indicating operative space-drive powercores exists almost two thousand miles due east of here."

"Two thousand miles..." he said. He looked up at her sharply. "A bad landing window, I take it."

She gave the rest to him, then: the fact that the star-ship had been verging on the system when it broke up; that none of the other lifeship modules had been favorably situated by trajectory to take advantage of it. What she didn't have to tell him, because he understood it quite easily, was the simple

fact that so abrupt a deceleration from near-light-speed was enormously power consuming, and they were lucky the module had landed them at all.

When she was finished, she added, "I must say you've taken it more calmly than I'd expected."

He shrugged. "I've gotten used to taking what life deals me. So we're on the wrong planet. So nu? We're alive and in good health, I take it?"

"We are alive," Vana said.

Aaron's gaze strayed again to the heavy sunlight against the door. "The other two?" he asked.

She shook her head. "Chaimon—the tall, thin one?—did not take the news well. Elton took him out into the air. They've been having some sort of argument ever since."

Aaron nodded. "I see." He stretched his arms and yawned. "I've had enough of these crowded quarters myself. Let's join them."

The lifeship module rested in a gentle meadow shelved against the wooded slope of a low mountain. The sky was the color of old glass, a queer translucence across which low clouds of dirty yellow moved slowly. The sun was a heavy disk of bright copper at least twice the diameter of Sol. Its light, filtered through the sky, reminded Aaron of ancient manuscripts and dusty attics. The thought was followed by a stab of nostalgia that deepened into a pang of homesickness. *But I knew I'd never be going back*, he told himself.

Perhaps it was just a trick of the light, but the grass and the foliage of the trees beyond had a reddish cast when he didn't look directly at them. Downslope the land plunged sharply, and far below a landscape spread out toward the hazy horizon, dotted with random patterns of forest and grasslands. A winding ribbon of grey caught

and bounced the burnished sunlight back at one point in its course. It seemed a totally desolate place, subtly alien and unpleasant. Aaron shook himself. *There are people here, somewhere. All we have to do is find them.* It seemed an impossible task. He turned his mind to the more immediate problem.

"No," the tall, thin man with the long dark hair was saying. "Why should I?"

"Look, Chaimon," Vana said, her voice soothing. "You were tested and found fit to be a colonist. Surely you can rise to meet this situation."

"Too abstract," Elton said. Elton was of average height, but of unaverage thickness: he resembled a barrel, his head settled almost directly upon his massive shoulders and topped by rusty hair worn in the current fad for ringlets. *Give him a toga...* Aaron thought, fleetingly. "Look, Chaimon, it really doesn't matter what you expected, what you wanted. You're here, got it? You want to survive, you want to see your Ellanie again, you got to get over this fit of yours. Kicking the ground won't change things. We're here, and that's it."

Elton had filled him in. Chaimon had made an agreement with a girl in one of the other modules. They'd met during the Testing, and despite rules, they'd formed some sort of relationship. From Chaimon's point of view it had been a simple arrangement: when they reached Frederick 201, the world they were to colonize, the two of them would "discover" each other again, form a legal alliance, and happily live out their days as noble pioneers together.

Now that could never happen. Chaimon's beloved Ellanie was in another module—there was no telling which one—and almost certainly destined to survive, if she and her module survived at all, in another life-time. The odds that he would ever see her again were too slim to be rationally considered.

Chaimon was not being rational about it,

but he appeared to accept the odds. They had brought him to the edge of despair, where he now hovered, awaiting only the final push.

The four of them were two thousand miles from this planet's sole spaceport, and an unknown distance from any other populated areas. They had only the life-stores of the module—intended for use for only a brief duration—and their wits to fall back upon. If the four of them pulled together they might make it. If they fell apart now, they probably would not. Thus, the immediate problem: help Chaimon back from the edge and organize them all into a viable group. Aaron sighed. Well, that was *his* job.

"Chaimon," he said, kneeling beside the man. Chaimon sat facing down the slope, legs loosely sprawled in the grass before him, his eyes locked glassily upon the fixed horizon. Elton combined a shrug and a grunt eloquently, and turned away. Vana hovered behind them, nervously. "Chaimon," Aaron repeated quietly, "do you know who I am?"

Chaimon spoke grudgingly. "You're Aaron."

"You remember me?"

"From the Testing Center? Yes."

"That's good." He'd been afraid, when Chaimon had stopped his emotional outburst against fate and his companions and flopped sullenly to the grass, that the man was withdrawing from the entire unpleasant situation. He reminded himself that Chaimon had been Tested, and must have greater shock resiliency than that.

"Tell me, Chaimon, when did you meet Ellanie?"

Chaimon turned his head then, to fix Aaron with his flat, dull gaze. "Are you an Official?" he asked.

"Would it matter?" Aaron countered. "Here?"

Chaimon returned his stare to the horizon. "No," he said. "I guess not."

"Tell me about Ellanie, how you met her," Aaron suggested. Behind him, he heard Vana choke back a sharp word. He wished she'd follow Elton's example and go somewhere else. He knew what she was thinking—that he was a fool to keep harping upon the girl—and he could only hope she would keep such thoughts to herself.

"I met her..." Chaimon said, stumbingly, "in the Rec Area, the first night... We played a game of Bocci. She won."

"Did she?" Aaron said. "And you continued to see each other during the free periods?"

"Yes."

"How many nights?"

Chaimon made an impatient movement with his shoulders. "Every night."

"For the duration of the Testing program, then," Aaron said. "How many nights was that?"

"All of them," Chaimon returned, shortly.

"I know that," Aaron said, still gently. "From the first night of Testing until you were put into the Sleep Of The Long Moment and transshipped. How many nights, Chaimon?"

Chaimon turned his head again, and his eyes seemed troubled, as though the realization of what Aaron meant was lurking somewhere not far behind them. "Seven ... nights," he said slowly.

"Seven nights," Aaron agreed. "A lifetime can occur in seven nights. Was it that way for you?"

Chaimon did not reply.

"How many hours each night were you able to spend together?" Aaron asked then.

Chaimon did not speak until Aaron was about to ask him again, and then he spoke in a very low voice, so that Aaron had to lean

forward to catch his words: "An hour or two. Three at the most."

"You did not find much privacy, I should guess."

"No. None."

"You didn't sleep together?"

Chaimon's pale skin reddened. "No. I told you: we had no privacy."

"But you did enjoy that special bliss of two people in love?" Aaron probed. "That bliss that creates its own zone of special privacy?"

Chaimon did not answer.

"You pledged to meet on Frederick 201 and marry?"

Again, no answer. The flush had not gone away, but had deepened, travelling down Chaimon's neck.

"What was her module number, do you recall?" Aaron asked.

"I don't remember."

"You did know it, though?"

"I don't ... she didn't ... give it ... to me."

"But you were two young people in love!" Aaron protested.

Chaimon hung his head.

Aaron leaned out and put his hand under Chaimon's chin, lifting the thin man's head and turning it until their eyes locked. "A sad deceit, Chaimon," he said. "Why prolong it?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Of course you do, my friend. But it means nothing, here. You do not need it. You can face us openly. We are all comrades in disaster. Come, now, tell me the truth."

Chaimon's eyes slipped away from Aaron's.

"Shall I tell you, then?" Aaron said softly. When the other remained silent, he did so: "You met the girl; that I believe. You spent your evenings with her; that also is true, is it not? Yes. But you made no pledges to one another. You never spoke of it, in fact. But perhaps you dreamed of it?"

Chaimon shuddered, a deep convulsion

that travelled his whole body. "Yes," he said. "I dreamed of her in the Sleep Of The Long Moment. I fell in love with her then."

"Ahh, I see," Aaron said. And he did. He had thought the man to be acting out a fantasy on his disappointment of a lost opportunity. He had made the assumption that Chaimon had projected his anticipated wooing of the girl into a post-dated fact—that Chaimon grieved in fact because he had lost his chance to pursue the girl. It made a more acceptable tragedy to have won and lost her than never to have won her at all.

But there was also the matter of the Sleep Of The Long Moment. No one had yet isolated the factor responsible—perhaps the chemicals injected into the Sleeper; perhaps a metabolic reaction to the state of hibernation with its attendant slowdown of the body functions—but a Sleeper knew only a single moment, a single episode of dream, between the moment he was put to sleep and the moment he awoke. The length of time he spent suspended in the Sleep Of The Long Moment did not seem to matter: the subjective length of the Dream was always the same and seemed to fill the entire length of the Sleep. It was Aaron's private opinion that the Dream occurred only in a few flash moments at the beginning of the Sleep, before that part of the brain suspended its operations, perhaps to be restimulated as the Sleeper was brought back to normal wakefulness. But that was before he had himself slept the Sleep Of The Long Moment; now he was less certain.

Because the Dream was unlike most dreams a man might know. This too was a recognized, if unexplained fact: the Dream was of unusual intensity, and concerned itself with that emotional aspect of his life most important to the Sleeper. Indeed, there had been abuse of the Sleep Of The Long Moment when this was first

discovered: illicit places set up the business of providing these dreams to Sleepers who came to receive their injections and go into the Sleep for a single day, waking at the end of that day to go their way. As a vice which offered easy escape, it seemed ideal. The only drawback was discovered after such places had been in operation for more than a year: the frequent slowing and restoring of a human metabolism worked directly counter to the purpose for which the Sleep had been originally invented: it induced rapid aging. A man might safely use the Sleep as often as once a year, but addicts who used it daily were far more common. At the year's end, their young lives were largely spent. And yet they still returned, for another opportunity to Dream.

If Chaimon had dreamed of the girl he had met, that alone might have been enough, Aaron reckoned, to send him into a frenzy when he awoke to find himself permanently separated from her. The Dream-memory would be far stronger than his actual and less exciting memories of her. The Dream-memory could haunt a man if he let it.

He had to restore perspective. He had to show Chaimon that the man had not permanently shamed himself before his companions. He had to show him that his knowledge of the girl was only casual—by no means as exaggerated as, in his Dream—and of no long-range importance.

It was not easy. It took a matter of hours, sitting patiently beside the other who was now by turns morose, shamefaced, shy, and finally increasingly confident. It meant shooing Elton away more than once, and ignoring the sometimes intrusive, if silent, presence of Vana nearby. But he persisted, and in time he was rewarded. He had led Chaimon through the man's memories many times, until he thought almost they were his own. He knew every Bocci score, he winced at the casual glances passing

Officials had bestowed upon the couple, and he could even feel, empathetically, the wistful sense of loss Chaimon still felt as the man faced the simple fact that what once might have been could now never be. Like the first girl upon whom one had a crush, unrequited, unspoken, and now forever lost amid the shifting tides of time and fortune, Chaimon's Ellanie was a What-Might-Have-Been, and not a What-Was or What-Could-Be. In that lay the true tragedy of it all. But only that and nothing more.

At last, drained and shaking in the cool dusk, Aaron rose with the other man and gave him a light slap on his back. They laughed together quietly, and then Chaimon said, "I guess I've put off my share of the load long enough, haven't I?" and went off around the module in search of Elton. Aaron remained standing in the matted grass, staring out at the gathering darkness on the land below.

Then he felt a touch on his arm. It was Vana. "I don't know how you did it," she said quietly.

He turned to face her, and her shadowed face looked exactly like the one in his own Dream. He forced an easy laugh. "That's my job," he said. "I'm a psychotherapist."

For a single moment they remained suspended in an amber mood. Then Elton's shout shattered the stillness.

"Look, look!" he shouted, and they both looked.

Down in the land somewhere below, already blanketed with night, a single bright beam of light raced like a grounded comet from east to west, following an undeviating straight line until it disappeared.

"So there are people here after all," Vana breathed.

"Yes," Aaron said. "We'll find them, now."

—William C. Johnstone

CHRISTOPHER ANVIL

The crew of the Starlight were hardened spacemen, capable of handling any kind of trouble that might come up . . . if they recognized it in time. The problem this time was that warnings were useless, and experience a tardy teacher, when they underwent—

TRIAL BY SILK

Illustrated by RALPH REESE

AFTER ALMOST a hundred days on a space transport, we were naturally happy to land on an Earth-type planet. —Any Earth-type planet.

Our captain this trip was a burly New Venusian named Engstrom. On the big screen over the forward loudspeaker of the public address system, his image showed a discomfort hard to explain. His hemming, hawing, and fidgeting added nothing worth having, either.

Beside me, Willis murmured fervently, "I wish we had the Captain back."

When anyone on *Starlight* spoke the word "captain" with such reverence, he meant, not Engstrom, but our previous captain, who'd recently been transferred to one of the company's newer and faster ships.

I murmured, "Engstrom's a good man. Moreover, he's captain now, so we have to stand up for him."

As Willis and I were respectively third and second in command of the ship, there was no escaping our duty to back up the captain.

Willis growled, "He's not making it easy for us."

On the screen, Engstrom mopped his forehead, hesitated, and cleared his throat.

The crewmen were starting to make ironical comments.

"Now, men," said Engstrom. He coughed, adjusted his tie, rattled a piece of paper, and cleared his throat again.

Willis groaned. "This is pathetic."

"Shut up," I said.

"H'r'm!" said Engstrom, moving around on the screen. "Men, I—ah—It— At this point, I'd like to say a few words—"

"Damn it," muttered Willis, "say them!"

Instead, Engstrom hesitated.

The crewmen were now grinning and joking, and several of the technicians were trying to decide what the captain most resembled as he struggled on the screen. The two leading comparisons were: a) a bachelor trying to change a baby's diaper; b) a perspiring father trying to explain the facts of life to someone who already knew them.

Willis growled, "What's the *matter* with him, anyway?"

"I don't know. He's used the P.A. system before without all this. What's he trying to say?"

"I don't know. But I wish he'd say it and get it over with."

From Engstrom's red face and damp forehead, it was possible to make a shrewd deduction. We could only hope that wasn't it.

Engstrom cleared his throat again. "Men—ah—This is very difficult. I don't know quite how—But it's my duty to tell you, as a captain, that the—er—women—ah—on this planet—are—"

Willis pressed his palm to his forehead.

The men hooted.

Around us stood the grinning crew, tough, competent, obviously well able to take care of themselves.

"—not," said Engstrom, struggling on grimly, "quite the way they seem. I—ah—ah—speak from—ah—experience—and—"

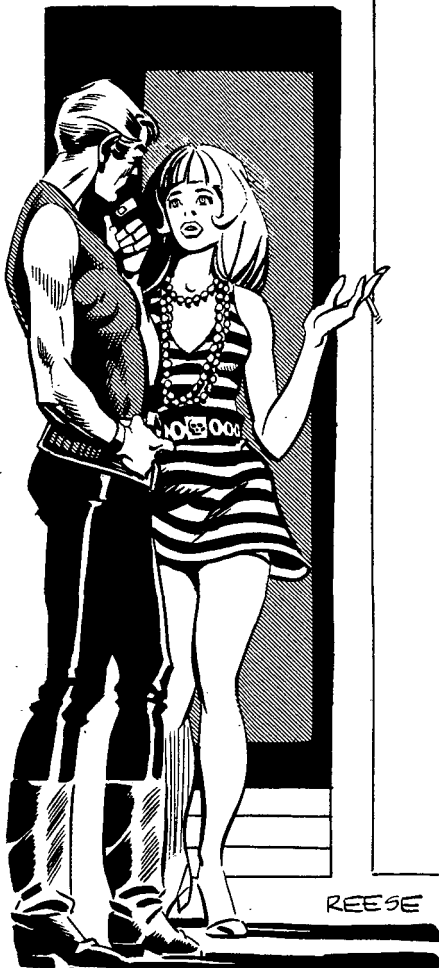
The men burst into laughter. Willis pivoted on his heel and rested his brow against the bulkhead. The air filled with ribald comments.

"—and, so," said Engstrom. "I have got to warn you... And let me go further. The drink here is not quite the same as the drink on other worlds. Except water. Their water is safe. And watch out for their so-called 'barbeques,' and feasts of all kinds. There isn't a pleasure on this planet, except to look at their scenery—with due care—and drink their water—that isn't in some way—ah—'funny'."

The laughter had now faded out. Everyone was listening. No one wants to get mugged, blackjacked, or rolled, and there are planets with very cute arrangements for doing these and other things.

"It's a hard thing," said Engstrom, "to get across. There is no coercion on this planet. —None at least, that an outsider might see. You won't be knocked over the head, held up, or in any other war roughly

SIZZLE PALACE



treated. There isn't a thing we can object to. There's nothing here contrary to the Interstellar Trade Association's standard Code of Conduct. This planet rates AAA in the Bluebook. But, men—" Again there was that urgent expression, like a man looking for a place to put a hot rivet—"watch out for them. Be on your best behavior. —Ah—Be *careful*— Whatever you do, *don't enjoy yourself!* —I mean—You *know* what I mean! —Anyway—That's it."

The captain's little talk came to an end.

The screen went blank.

The laughter of the crewmen was like ripples on a pool during a steadily-strengthening rainstorm. The whole place seemed to dissolve into laughter.

Willis and I felt our way out, to meet Schmidt coming down the corridor from the direction of the mess hall, where there was another P.A. speaker. Schmidt had the look of a man with sinus trouble, on a ship with a faulty pressure control.

The three of us huddled together in a funeral atmosphere, while laughter reached us from both directions, up and down the corridor.

Schmidt groaned. "What do we do now?"

Willis looked at me. "What do we do about this, sir?" He slightly emphasized the "sir," subtly reminding me that I had the rank and was therefore stuck with the problem.

On these civilian space transports, there's sometimes a tendency for first, second, and third officers to form a cheerful little club, devoid of outward display of rank. This happy democracy falls apart when the buck has to be passed, either down or up.

Willis and Schmidt watched me attentively. The captain's talk had us all punch-drunk, but it was now *my* duty to pull out of the stupor and get us moving in some direction.

Schmidt said hesitantly, "I suppose we

ought to put an end to that laughter—"

"No," I said. "We'd make ourselves look like fools trying to stop them from laughing. We probably *couldn't* stop them. Did you ever try to stop anyone from laughing? We'd be laughing ourselves before we got through. And on top of that, the end of that little talk was the signal that the men could go off the ship. Any minute now, they'll start piling into the tender. We'd better just let them laugh. If there's anything to what the captain says, they won't be laughing on the return trip."

"What," said Schmidt, "*could* there be? He said himself that there's no *coercion*."

Willis quoted, "*You won't be knocked over the head, held up, or in any other way roughly treated.*" —Just exactly what can go wrong?"

Just then a couple of crewmen, obviously on their way to the tender, walked briskly by. One grinned at us, and held up a pair of spiked shoes.

Schmidt fell for it. "What do you want *track* shoes for?"

"To run away from the girls with, sir." The crewman made his face very serious.

His friend added gravely, "The one that caught the captain might still be around down there, sir. We don't want to take any chances." He produced a small tear-gas gun, and looked grim.

Schmidt was speechless. Willis growled in an undertone. "What the devil did you give him an opening for?"

Now, down the corridors came more of our shining-faced crew, all capable spacemen, most of them the masters of skills and techniques that required long thought, practice, and hard discipline, but each one possessed by that ironical humor that rises spontaneously when a crewman sees an officer—theoretically wiser than the crewman—make a total unmitigated ass of himself.

One of the crewmen carried a black thread, on the end of which bobbed and imitation soft-plastic tarantula. One carried a wire cage inside of which, its many teeth bared, lurked a *shreat*. —That is a kind of vicious ratlike animal used in laboratory work. Another crewman had a large-fanged snake's head stuck out of his jacket pocket. Each of these crewmen earnestly reassured his friends that, yes, the planet's predatory girls were *sure* to be scared off by trantula, *shreat*, or snake.

"I mean," said a crewman briskly carrying a small stuffed alligator under his arm, "what if some beautiful wench comes after me and this *doesn't* scare her off? Eh? Then what?"

A technician wearing a set of one-man rocket wings said earnestly, "You fellows are crazy to rely on psychological stuff. We may have to run."

There were plenty of suppressed snickering and gagging sounds, but it was impossible to spot a crewman who didn't have his face set in lines of honest worry.

Willis spat out a low curse as one clumped by wearing body armor and a jack-suit, and carrying across his shoulders a three hundred pound Hellwein dissipator, complete with pronged flaring tripod mount, loops of thick black cable, and power pack.

Schmidt, red-faced, obviously didn't trust himself to say anything. Willis looked away and snarled, "How did they get all this stuff together so damned fast?"

"In a situation like this," I said, "they're inspired. Ordinary human limitations don't count."

"But where did that stuffed alligator come from? What fool would waste his weight allowance on a thing like that?"

"It's made of stiff lightweight plastic with a zipper up the underside. It's got compartments on the inside for razor, socks,

underwear, and so on, and the tongue reels out to snap into a socket near the left hind leg and make a carrying handle. It's an overnight bag. A thing as conspicuous as that helps in striking up a conversation on a strange planet."

"I suppose," said Willis, "that there's nothing illegal about *that*. But what do we do about that bird in body armor?"

Just then, half-a-dozen more men staggered by, clinging to the carrying handles of a fusion gun big enough to use in a siege.

There was no way out of it. "We'll have to stop them," I said. "We can't let anything like that go down with them."

But when we stopped them, the six crewmen with the fusion gun earnestly insisted that it was "Captain's orders, sir. The captain wants us to protect ourselves against the women down there, sir."

By the time we got the fusion gun back in the heavy weapons locker, the dissipator back in the repair shop, the jack suit, rocket wings, and body armor in the suit rack, and the *shreat* and its cage returned to the medic's lab, we were the maddest collection of ships' officers for light-years in all directions. The crewmen, meanwhile, leaned against the walls of the corridor, red-faced, hands clasped to their mouths and sides, shaking silently.

As the last of them piled into the tender, and just before the hatch completely shut, there was one big roar of laughter that rang in our heads long after the tender was on its way down.

"Well," said Willis, "thank God *that's* over with."

There was a scrape and a clang up the corridor, and Engstrom stepped into view. He was a big, blond, red-faced man with, at the moment, a somewhat haggard look.

"Did they understand?" he asked. "Did I get it across to them?" He spoke in earnest

tones, obviously appealing for reassurance.

Schmidt glanced at Willis, and Willis glanced at me. Schmidt then studied his shoes while Willis directed his gaze toward outer space.

Menatly damning Schmidt and Willis, I tried to somehow reconcile that last roar of laughter with the earnest appeal on Engstrom's face.

"Well, sir—ah—it seemed to me that they weren't quite clear how there could be any danger, if they aren't going to be attacked or robbed, and if force was not going to be used on them in any way."

Engstrom groaned. "I was afraid of that. But damn it, how do you *tell* them? If I'd had time enough to think it out—but the cancel on that load at Calfax only just came through, and then the wait-and-liberty order got to us at the last possible moment—how could I *know*?"

Willis said, at first exasperatedly, "Yes, but just what the—ah—I mean—Sir—Why is there likely to be danger—down there, sir?"

While Willis was speaking, Engstrom's ineffectual embarrassment had given way to a direct blue gaze that held Willis as if he were in the grip of a vice. Engstrom had clearly detected something in Willis' tone that he didn't like, and Willis was at pains to get what was objectionable out of the way before the captain found it necessary to do the job himself.

"Then," said the captain, looking flatly at Willis, "you don't consider that there is any serious danger on this planet?"

"Oh, no, sir," said Willis, then paused. The captain was looking straight at him and Willis started over, this time with a certain determination in his voice. "Sir, *you've* been there and we haven't. I can't—I can't picture the *nature* of the danger."

Willis voice had started to climb toward the end, but abruptly he finished in a dead

level tone.

The captain looked at him a moment, his gaze hard and intent, then suddenly smiled.

"All I can say is that this is no easy thing to describe without sounding foolish, but if you go down there, remember this: There are supposed to be certain 'trials' or 'ordeals,' as for instance the 'trial by fire.' What you will experience if you go down on that planet is what might be called the 'trial by silk.' Let me tell you, it's tougher than you think."

The captain then nodded, closing the subject, and left us.

It may be that the wisest thing for the three of us to have done would have been to stay on board and catch up on sleep and unread technical manuals.

But between our own curiosity and the captain's uncommunicativeness, we naturally got into a frame of mind that sent us down to the planet as soon as we'd made our final checks on a few items of the ship's equipment.

On the way down in the tender, Schmidt said, frowning, "What, exactly, is a 'trial by fire'?"

Willis said, "It's a—well, an ordeal."

"And what's an 'ordeal'?"

"H'm. Well, I think, in the old days back on Earth, well before space-flight, they used to decide whether a person was guilty or innocent by putting him through a 'trial by ordeal.' I suppose a trial by fire would mean you had to go through the fire and come out unharmed."

"Trial by silk—what would *that* be?"

"I don't know. Silk is soft, with a slick surface, and it's expensive stuff. We had some in a cargo on *Quicksure* one time."

We puzzled over this—without finding an answer—till we finally stepped out at the spaceport, and looked around warily, not knowing what to expect.

A pleasant blue sky looked down upon us. One or two small fluffy clouds drifted past. There were low green hills on three sides in the distance, and a mathematically straight road led from the spaceport toward the city we could see off on the horizon. The only unusual feature was a cluster of rusty space ships and tenders that formed a kind of junkyard stretching over about twenty acres of ground near the spaceport.

A groundcar, with the distinctive throb of an internal-combustion engine, pulled up beside us.

"Taxi, mates?"

"How much to the city?"

"Four-fifty for the three of you. And I'll take you anywhere in town you want to go. That is, if you all want to go to the same place."

"Fair enough." We piled in. Schmidt glanced out at the expanse of rusty ships. "Is that some kind of junkyard?"

"No. Nobody ever claimed them, so they just moved them back to get them out of the way."

Willis looked puzzled. "What do you mean, nobody ever *claimed* them?"

"Just like I said. They landed 'em. They left 'em. And nobody ever come back for 'em."

"Where did the crew *go*?"

"Into town."

The taxi was now speeding down the road.

There was a little silence, then Willis cleared his throat. "The same town we're headed for?"

"Yep." The driver shook a little white cylinder out of a rumpled pack, stuck it in his mouth, held a lighter to it, blew out a cloud of smoke, and snapped a switch on the dash. A powerful *whirr* started up somewhere, and the smoke trailed up through a large round grille in the ceiling.

A silence had developed in the car, and it

seemed to me that somebody ought to break it. "What—ah—what happened to the people who didn't come back to their ships?"

"Guess they stayed in the city."

"Why would they do that?"

The driver turned briefly to give a knowing leer. "Maybe they *liked* it there."

This produced another silence.

Schmidt had been eying the smoke whirling into the overhead grille. "What," he said, "is the purpose of this grille?"

"Why, it's the law, mate. Maybe smoke ain't your dish, see? Why should you have to take it just because I do?" He seemed amazed at the question. "Same reason you have to cap the fumes, even if you're a breather."

Schmidt opened his mouth and shut it again.

The driver seemed to have a sudden thought, and handed back his pack. "Help yourself, mate. I'm a slow one to take a hint."

We all looked at the pack, which had a white skull and crossbones against a black border that went around all sides, and on the front was a drawing of a city seen through a thick haze. In an arc over the city was the name, "SMOCS," and under that the words:

"SMOCS Specially-Treated Smokes. A blend of the finest tobaccos exquisitely flavored with a delicate tinge of sulfur, marijuana, cocaine, hashish, carbolic acid, and other ingredients listed in detail on the back."

Schmidt had started to pull out one of the whitish tubes, but let go of it as if he had a knife by the wrong end.

"Thanks a lot," he said, handing the pack back, "but I—ah—I don't feel too much like a smoke right now."

"Maybe," said the driver, "you like 'Nippers' better. They got more bite. I used

to like them myself, but they loosen your teeth too much."

This comment generated another considerable silence. There were more silences on that trip to town than anything else, despite the fact that we were all curious, and eager to learn all we could about this new planet.

The next time, it was the driver who broke the silence.

"Well, mates, what's your dish? Man was made for pleasure, and we got every kind of pleasure there is, right here for the taking. You name it and I'll take you there. What'll you have? Girls? Drinks? Combos? Whips? Feasts? Sizzlers? Dreams? —Or do you like the *stronger* stuff? We got good recoup palaces all over the city, mates. Makes no difference there. What'll you have?"

Doubtless this was supposed to disperse the gathering air of constraint, but it took about twenty seconds before any of us could speak. By this time, Willis had tried on a set of wrought-iron knuckles that he favored for such trips as this, smashed them lightly against his palm, and slid them back into his pocket. I saw Schmidt pat the center of his chest, where under his shirt the thin flat knife hung in its sheath, suspended by a slender chain around his neck. As for myself, I have to admit to fingering with one hand the somewhat narrow thick belt I'd selected after hearing the captain's speech and later warning, while my other hand assured me that I had worn the right pair of shoes for the place we were getting into.

Schmidt cleared his throat. In a somewhat tight voice, he said, "Maybe you'd better just let us out in the shopping district. We can look around for ourselves afterward."

The driver sounded puzzled. "Why, mate, that's where I'm *going* to let you out. In the shopping district. But what do you

want to shop *for*? Like I say, we got everything."

Willis' mind was apparently functioning faster than Schmidt or I could take credit for. "Did you by any chance take anyone from *Starlight* anywhere?"

"Why, yes, mate, I did. Three trips."

"What did *they* want? Where did *they* go?"

This could be an important thing for us to know, later on. We might have to do quite a bit of hunting to collect the crew, and it wouldn't hurt to know where to start.

"Well," said the driver, "I'm not supposed to tell, but— Wait a minute. Are you asking about individuals, or just about the bunch as a whole—the most of them?"

"Just the bunch as a whole." Willis had his eyes narrowed. "Not any particular individual."

"Well, I guess I can tell you that." He blew out a puff of thick gray smoke, which was promptly whirled up into the grille. "The most of them—I don't say 'all' and I don't say *not-all*, either, but the most of them *I* brought in were combo men."

This produced another of those generous silences that punctuated the trip.

Willis glanced at me, and I shrugged. Schmidt looked blank. We were mentally running through the list of human frailties, wondering what "combo" might be. According to the driver, most of our crew were "combo" men. Here we had shipped with them over a considerable stretch of universe and never even guessed it. It seemed to show that you might live with people, sleep and eat with them, for months and months, and never really know them. Just waht was *combo*? Evidently they preferred it to girls, drinks, whips, feasts, dreams, and sizzlers. Somehow it didn't sound good. Schmidt and Willis became glum and silent, and I was almost afraid to speak, myself. But we had to find out.

"Ah," I said finally, "this—this 'combo' you speak of—"

"Yes, mate?" The driver sounded hopeful.

"Well—ah—*What is it?*"

We sat there in a state of paralyzed suspense. We *had* to find out what it was. Yet we were none too eager to find out, either. If you will just imagine that you and a few friends suddenly discovered that you had unsuspectingly shipped out for a long trip with almost a whole shipload of "combo-men," you will see what I mean. You would rather find out about a thing like that at the beginning or the end then halfway through the trip.

The driver meanwhile stopped the car and looked back. "Are you serious, mate?"

"Yes."

Schmidt said tightly, "We'd like to know."

The driver stared at us, cleared his throat, and scarcely seemed to know how to approach the subject. Finally he said, "You must be *real* high-flyers."

Willis said sharply, "What is it?"

"Well, mate—" The driver cleared his throat again—"No need to get excited. It's just what it sounds like. A 'combo' is a—Well, it's a combo, that's what it is—A *combination*. Drinks *and* girls, with some feasts and smokes on the side, and maybe a little something extra later on. A combo is a—a combo, if you see what I mean."

Willis sighed.

Schmidt sat there with a blank expression.

Willis began to laugh.

I told the driver to take us to the same place most of our men had gone to. He nodded, and started up the car again.

The rest of that trip was one long silence. We got out, the driver accepted his pay, scratched his head, and drove off. We looked around. Willis had one hand in his pocket, and Schmidt had idly unbuttoned

the third button of his shirt. As for myself, I was wishing that I'd brought along something with larger caliber than the cobra belt and persuader shoes. The three of us were now, of course, wideawake, looking around intently.

Willis said, "This place must be the worst sinkhole in this end of the universe, but it doesn't *look* it."

We were looking across a wide street, with a moderate amount of traffic moving in the street, with granite buildings six to ten stories high across the street, and, behind us, a park with neatly-mowed green lawn, tall flowering shrubs, an artificial lake in which a few people were swimming, and a sandy beach on which lay a host of people.

Schmidt growled, "Offhand, this place *looks* like some kind of utopia."

Willis nodded but stuck his hand in his pocket. "We'd better stick close together."

I happened to glance across the street. "Look there."

Gaites, one of our crewmen, was strolling blissfully along with his arm around a gorgeous blonde.

Schmidt let out a low involuntary whistle.

Willis said wonderingly, "That's one of the most beautiful girls I've ever seen."

Schmidt shook himself. "We better watch out. There's a trap around here somewhere."

Down the sidewalk from the other direction, clasping and unclasping hands with a very warm-looking brunette, came Ferralli, another crewman.

Schmidt whistled again. Willis swore in low fervent tones.

Somewhere, there was a peculiar rumble, and after glancing around futilely for the source, a shadow passed across the street, and I looked up.

A kind of metal bridge passed overhead, apparently supporting a moving walkway. Two extremely shrewd-looking men glided

past, talking in low tones, and plainly oblivious to everything below.

I glanced down, and there, right in front of me, was a honey-blonde girl with a beautiful figure, wearing a knitted tan dress, and brushing back a lock of hair that fell over her forehead. She said, smiling, "You seem to be a stranger here. May I show you our city?"

Willis and Schmidt were looking on, enviously.

Anyone might suppose that, after the captain's warning, the taxi driver's comments, and the suspiciously utopian look of this place, the three of us would have been on guard and well able to take care of ourselves. Yet here we were like three bugs jostling each other for the first chance to fall into the cyanide bottle.

"Ah—ah—" I said stupidly. Willis slid his knuckles back in his pocket and ran a hand over his hair. Schmidt straightened up and put a look of charm on his face. The girl kept her warm gaze focused on me, and, promptly forgetting the graveyard of rusty ships out by the spaceport, I eagerly accepted. The two of us wandered off, enveloped in a delightful haze.

As we strolled down the street, the girl, true to her word, showed me the fountains, pools, lakes, theatres, wine shops, a communal-feast and barbecue center, free communal dwellings, drug shops, fume dispensaries, sizzle palaces—

"Look," I asked, "what happens in the 'sizzle palace'?" The "sizzle palace" had an exceptionally conspicuous skull and crossbones over the entrance.

She kept a gentle grip on my arm, and shivered. "It's terrible. I—I can't talk about it."

Another traveling walk carried a superior-looking individual who glanced down to favor me with a brief pitying look. I looked up at the walk.

"What's that?"

The girl glanced up, and looked embarrassed. "Some people don't know how to live. The walks are for them, to cross over this part of the city. Poor people."

"From the expressions of the ones I've seen, they seem satisfied with themselves."

"Sh-h. Of course they are. That's how we keep them happy."

"You keep them happy by letting them feel superior?"

"Yes, and then we let them do the work of running the city." She shrugged prettily. "It's their dish."

I looked around. With the solitary exception of those overhead traveling walkways, just about everything in sight seemed to be for the purpose of giving pleasure. Now I noticed something else. There were plenty of attractive people around, but the cut-off age seemed to be about thirty-five. Even on the rougher frontier planets, you see people who have managed to survive for more than thirty-five years.

"How is it everyone seems fairly young?"

"Why, when they're worn out, they take a recoup."

"A what?"

"Recoup. They get into the recuperator and it renews them."

"Forever?"

"Oh, no. Sometime or other, they won't make it, and then the bottom drops out." She shrugged. "They never know it."

"So they only live to about thirty-five?"

"Oh, no. That's frightfully old." She giggled. "Who would want to live *that* long?"

I guess I must have looked blank. I'd kind of hoped to make it past that barrier myself.

"Then," I said, "the 'recoup' wears them out?"

She looked amused. "No, silly. Man was made for *pleasure*, and it's the *pleasure* that

wears him out, not the recoup. But the recoup recharges him; and sometimes he's not in good enough shape to recharge. That's all."

"How long do people last?"

"Oh, twenty-five, twenty-eight, twenty-nine. Who wants to talk about *that*?" She looked faintly puzzled; then murmured, "I *am* forgetful," and removed from her small handbag a little bottle. It mustn't have been over an inch long, and possibly three-eighths of an inch thick, with a tiny gold cap. She withdrew the cap, which had a slender glass rod attached, and touched the tip of the rod to her wrists, the hollow of her throat and her forehead.

There was a faint, indescribably delicious fragrance. I had a brief glimpse of a golden skull and crossbones on the bottle, and the word, "CAPTURE."

Two superior-looking men in their forties slid by overhead. One of them looked down, nudged his companion, said something, and the two of them laughed.

There's nothing to bring a man out of the fog quite like a certain kind of laughter. But it doesn't bring him out in a pleasant frame of mind. I looked at the girl and said roughly, "What's your price?"

She looked puzzled. "*Price*?"

"After we have our pleasant little dream together, how do I pay you?"

"Pay? You mean money? But I have an allowance! Everyone has! Why should I want *money*?"

"Who pays the allowance?"

"The government, of course! Oh, I keep forgetting you're a stranger."

"On any planet I've ever been on, people need more money than they had."

"Yes, but those are *backward* planets. Here we understand all that. Money is only good to guy *pleasure*. The greatest pleasures are the pleasures of the senses. When those are available in full measure, *what good is*

more money?"

It began to be clear just what the captain was up against trying to describe this place.

"Listen," I said doggedly, "you can't have that without paying for it *some* way. Here, you evidently pay by being finished off in your twenties. You lose better than half your life in the process."

"But shouldn't a life be measured by the total amount of pleasure received; not by the years it lasts?"

This stopped me for a few seconds, though there was plainly *something* wrong with it.

"Life," I said, groping around for the answer, "is too complicated to measure *either* way. Besides, what about accomplishment? How can you *do* anything if you're smothered in sense-pleasures all the time? And speaking of 'pleasures,' what—"

"Oh," she said angrily, "why do I waste my time with *you*? You belong up there with *them*!" She pointed up at the walkway, turned on her heel and started across the park.

The natural response, of course, was to rush off after the girl. But as she turned, for the first time I really saw the small, jeweled clip she used to hold back her long honey-blond hair. In color, it matched her dress. Its shape was that same skull and crossbones found on bottles of boison, and across the street on the "sizzle palace."

It occurred to me that there are other girls on other worlds, and it doesn't chop thirty or forty years off a man's life to know them.

Across the park, from the direction of the building marked "Sizzle Palace" in glowing letters three yards high, came a man carrying in one hand a thing like a papier-mache mock-up of an iron maiden, with an electric cord draped over one arm and disappearing into the battery pack he carried in his other hand.

"Hop in, pal. I'll give you a sample right here. One shot and you'll never be the same again."

"What do *you* get out of it?"

"Well, of course," he said defensively, "I've got my quota to fill. But that's *my* lookout, pal, not yours. Hop in, now."

"No, thanks."

"Come on. I've only got one more to go today."

"I said 'No.'"

"I don't want any trouble with you, pal, but you're going to get in. You don't know what you're missing."

I slid off the cobra belt, and waited for his next move.

He stood eyeing that long length of narrow strap with its peculiar flexible movement and the glittering metal tongue on the end.

He licked his lips, and said, "Guess you're really *not* interested. Well, better luck next time." He backed off with his portable case and battery pack.

No sooner had I turned from him than a brisk little man stepped forward to thrust out a long length of tubing with a pipe-stem on one end.

"Congratulations on escaping that vulture, sir. Here, take a puff of Dreams at my expense."

A wisp of smoke was trailing out the end of the pipestem. The faintest hint of it drifted in my direction, creating a brief fantasy of jeweled palaces, slave girls, huge turbaned guards armed with curved swords—

"Here you are, sir."

Through an elaborately-figured bright-hued drape, I could see the smoking pipe-stem thrust forward, and had just sense enough to squeeze the grip of the cobra belt.

The belt rose up with a sinuous swaying motion, and the smoldering pipe-stem

retreated in a hurry. My head cleared.

"It certainly is disgraceful," said a new voice, "how these people *will* strain the law. Why, the way they try to force their interior pleasures on one!"

About ten feet away stood a man holding a contraption suggesting an overgrown underfed centipede standing upright on its tail. The thing was about six feet tall, with a spine like a length of iron pipe, and curving wires averaging about two feet long reaching out and forward from either side. It was evidently designed to reach around the happy victim. Just what happened next was something I wasn't anxious to find out.

"No, thanks."

"You never know till you try."

"And then it's too late."

"Ah, just a little whip won't—"

He was advancing with this happy-suicide device thrust out in front of him when the cobra belt lengthened out and thrust its metal snout in his face.

The whip salesman beat a hasty retreat. I turned with a sigh of relief, and there was a small crowd offering doped poison cigarets, liquor doubtless made with wood alcohol, kits containing exotic drugs, syringes, instruction books, and a map to use when the veins got hard to find. None of them asked money for this stuff. All you had to do was sign up with them, and let them supply the goods in the future. On the fringes of this crew, watching sadly and looking like an angel of light by contrast, was the honey-blond girl. She kept shaking her head to the importunities of the dope and poison salesmen around her, but the one with the pipe-stem on its long hose was now sneaking up from behind. A wisp of smoke trailed toward her.

I shouted, "Look out!" Almost simultaneously, there was the blast of a whistle.

"Watch it," came a stern voice from

above. "A little more of that and I'll have you for grabhandling."

A tall, powerfully-built figure in blue uniform was looking down from the edge of the overhead walk.

The crowd muttered, grumbled, and opened up a little. I lost no time in thrusting through to the girl's side. She looked up in surprise, then gave a happy sigh, caught my arm, and clung to it tightly.

The stern voice spoke again from above.

"Did any of these split dish on you?"

"No," called the girl, looking up, "we just—got separated by accident."

"All right."

The crowd now broke up, one or two of them kicking their display cases ill-temperedly.

It was just starting to get dark. The girl hummed happily to herself, took out her little bottle, and dabbed lightly at her wrists, behind her earlobes, and to either side of her neck. This slow vaporizing rapture enveloped us in an enchanted cloud, and we wandered around for a while with our feet scarcely touching the ground. Fortunately, it wore off about an hour later, and the girl then announced she was hungry. I agreed, and we soon wound up at a public feast-site.

Now, I see no objection to a good meal. But, looking around, it was pretty obvious that what we had here was something else.

Stretched out before us were rows of tables, with slanted leather couches on one side of each row of tables. Halfway down the nearest table a crewman was stretched out on a couch with a strikingly-beautiful exotic-looking girl beside him. The table itself was laden with what looked like roast chicken, ham, piles of steaks, and big flagons that were constantly being refilled. As fast as the diners finished one dish, waiters came over with more food and drink on electric carts and replenished the supply.

I looked around. *Starlight* was generously represented at the feast. The crewman I'd seen first was now lying back cozily as his girl dropped delicacies in his mouth. At another table was Ferralli, the drive technician. Ferralli was working with both hands at what looked like the equivalent of about half a ham. At another table lay Meeres, the medic, his head in a dish of some kind of stuffing, eating ravenously and not bothering with the knives and forks. Across on the other side of the place, the familiar face of Grunwald, the navigator, beamed like a pink moon as he raised a two-quart goblet of some pale-yellowish drink, and with the stuff spurting out both corners of his mouth, gulped steadily as he tried to finish off the whole half-gallon in one draught.

An involuntary curse escaped me as it dawned on me just what it was going to be like to crack the crew loose from this pesthole.

About halfway down the aisle between two rows of tables, a man in a white coat bent with a stethoscope over a motionless red-faced, open-mouthed male figure clutching a steak bone in one hand. The doctor listened judiciously, nodded, then someone pried loose the steakbone, two attendants rolled the figure off onto a stretcher and threw a sheet over it, and a man in a gray coat cheerfully put a mark in a record book he was carrying, and looked around hopefully at the other tables.

To tell the truth, this planet was getting a little hard to take. Every time you turned around, someone was right there to help you kill yourself. On other planets, the inhabitants would bash you over the head, rob you, and dump the carcass off a cliff. Here they expected you to jump off yourself, and somebody earned ten credits for it if you jumped off his end of the cliff. The obvious thing for us to do was to get out

of this place as fast as possible.

Beside me, the gorgeous blonde was dabbing droplets of liquid enchantment on her forehead, wrists, and behind her ears. As she turned her head, that skull-and-crossbones clasp in her hair came into view again.

Down the aisle, three of *Starlight's* crew staggered off toward one of the small blocky buildings that dotted the grounds. Remembering the Roman arrangements for repeated feasting, the whole business looked even worse. The only good thing about it was that a night like this was bound to be followed by a terrific hangover. During the hangover, the men would doubtless be too sick and weak to resist when we loaded them on board the tender.

To one side of me as I was thinking this, busy cooks were working over the meat as it traveled over the hot coals on revolving spits hung from an endless metal belt that moved along steadily. One of these cooks seemed to have the job of shaking on a greenish powder as the meat went past. The box had the familiar skull and crossbones symbol, with the word "ADDICTEEN" in an arc over it.

There was no doubt at all that we had to get out of this hole, and just as soon as possible.

From one side came a familiar voice, and I turned to see a crewman, a big chunk of meat clutched in both hands.

"Hey, sir," he yelled, "the captain was all wet about this place, wasn't he?"

Before I could think what to say, he ravenously tore off a fresh chunk of meat, looked up, and shouted, "Guess what? I'm settling here! I always wanted to be a pioneer!"

I stared around. "A *what*?"

"*Pioneer!*" He beamed. The sultry brunette beside him turned down a mug of steaming drink, and sank her dainty white teeth into what looked like an oversize

turkey leg. She gave a quick twist of the head as she tore off the meat, then sat back and chewed demurely.

Just then we came to the end of the line, and the cooks thrust out trays loaded with meat, gravy, and what looked like some kind of stuffing and mashed potatoes, and then we were at one of the feast tables, and an immaculately-dressed waiter was pouring out a sparkling drink that frosted the goblet as it filled it.

There was something about climbing up onto the slanted leather-covered platform beside the table that finished off my appetite, but the gorgeous blonde didn't hesitate. She daintily positioned herself on this slanted couch, and eyed the feast.

"What happens," I said, "when you *eat* this stuff? Can you eat other food afterward?"

"You won't *want* to."

Before I had added up all the trouble that was going to cause us, she said, "You just can't *ever* get enough of this. And it's the *eating* of the food that's pleasurable, not the *having* eaten it."

"What happens when the feast is *over*?"

She blushed. "I shouldn't tell you, but—" She brought out, cupped in her hand, a tiny bottle, with a gold and black label reading "Ravage." There was no skull-and-crossbones on the label. The whole bottle was in the shape of a skull and crossbones. On the back was superimposed a representation of what looked like some kind of spider.

It occurred to me again, with considerable force, that there were *other* girls.

She said sweetly, "Is there anything *else* you want to know?"

"Not just now."

She tore into the nearest tray, while I meditated on what to do next. I glanced around, picked up one of several bones lying around on the table, rolled over on my

back, clutching the bone in my hand, and bared my teeth.

About five minutes crept past.

"H'm," said a voice from the direction of my feet. "*Here's an odd case.*"

I gave a long rasping inhalation, and the voice murmured, "*Interesting.*"

A cool hand rested on my forehead and a thumb peeled back my left eyelid.

"Put this one on a stretcher, and take him into the waiting room. I'll want to examine this a little more closely."

We wound up in a dim-lit grisly place behind a screen of evergreens, with moaning bodies, covered with perspiration, strewn around on the ground.

As the doctor carried out his examination, I said, "I'm from off-planet. What's the purpose of this pleasure set up?"

"Why, to let the unfit pleasure-lovers eliminate themselves! If you let them have their own way, they will wreck any civilization ever built—unless you make allowance to get *rid* of them ... Now, open your mouth, and let's see your tongue ... H'm ... *Cough* ... That's enough. Roll over ... Yes, you see, rot and corruption set into every civilization ever built, unless an iron discipline is imposed, or some means is provided to exterminate the hedonists who spread the corruption. The best way to get rid of them, obviously, is to provide them with exactly what they want. It is the genius of our planet that we have worked out how to do it. The expense is really very modest, as long as you let them finish themselves off fast, so their numbers don't become too great."

As he talked, he probed with his fingers, apparently feeling of this and that internal organ.

I said, "What about their—ah—souls?"

"That's not *my* responsibility."

"What happens," I said, "when I try to get our crew out of here?"

He frowned, peering into my eye again.

"You're a ship captain?"

"First officer."

"Is your crew something of a—er—dead-end outfit—"

"They're good men."

"Then the majority of them are running wild because of deprivation, not a natural greed for compounded sensations. By tomorrow morning, they'll have had the equivalent of a two-weeks binge, all in one night. Sanity will reassert itself over what's left of them. All you have to do is collect them from the gutters."

"What happens when we lug them back onto the ship, and they can't eat anything without 'addicteen' in it?"

"Well— You can keep them alive on sugar-water, lemonade—things of that sort, till the desire for food returns. After about six weeks, I should say, they'll start to recover. In three or four years, they may even look back on their experience as pleasurable. In ten years, they may think it was idyllic. Twenty years from now, some of them may wonder why they didn't stay. It's hard to remember a hangover with real accuracy for twenty years." He straightened.

"Whatever *your* trouble is, I think it's temporary."

"Good," I said. "Thanks."

He nodded, and moved away.

One of the corpses lying nearby rolled over and spoke in Willis' voice. "Quite a planet. Now I know why the captain couldn't give us a straight warning. *He* was here about ten years ago."

"Whoever listed this place AAA must have been here twenty years ago."

"At least."

"Where's Schmidt?"

"The last I saw of him, he was wandering around with a terrific brunette. But he kept giving her hair-clasp a funny look, if you follow me."

"I know what you mean." I got to my

feet, and looked out. He wasn't at any of the nearby tables, and I glanced at the line of people entering.

There was Schmidt, giving the cook with the "Addicteen" box a worried look. The brunette standing in line with him was enough to double a man's pulse at a hundred feet. She favored him with a sweltering look, and ran her hand lightly up and down his arm. He, in turn, darted swift glances in all directions, and suddenly spotted us.

A few minutes later, they left with trays. Shortly after that, he joined us.

"I may kick myself later, but this stuff has more voltage than I'm used to."

"Before you start kicking yourself, take a look in here."

Schmidt glanced around, and swore in low fervent tones. Then we told him what the doctor had said.

He shook his head. "We better get all the crew loose from here that we can. Otherwise, we're going to have a sweet time handling the ship."

"And what kind of a time will we have when they sober up and remember what we broke up for them?"

"If they aren't nuts, they'll be grateful."

Willis shook his head.

Schmidt said, "They aren't stupid. If we can see it, why can't they?"

"It's our job to get everybody back on time. If it was *their* job to get *us* back, the situation might be different."

"Truth in that," growled Schmidt. "Well—What do we do?"

I said, "Let's circulate around, and see if anyone looks like he *wants* help."

Not all the crew was there, but those who were obviously did not want help. We then looked around the city, fighting off sizzle, whip, and dream salesmen, and trailed by pretty girls. None of the rest of the crew was visible anywhere. We went back to the feast grounds, and most of the crew had

disappeared. We came out in none too happy a frame of mind, and abruptly Schmidt said, "What a *hell* of a liberty!"

Willis growled something unintelligible, and I snarled, "Let's take one more look through that hole in there."

We went back inside the grisly dim-lit place back of the trees, and moved slowly amongst the apparent bodies. One sodden swollen form groaned, and the voice of Ferralli, the drive-technician, croaked, "My God, sir ... Get me out of here."

No miserable ruin ever got a more fervent welcome. Here, at least, was proof we were doing some good. As the three of us were carefully lugging him toward the exit, a dim figure weakly raised its hand. The voice of Meeres, the medic, was barely recognizable.

"Help ... don't leave me ... drugged ... please..."

We stopped.

This wasn't so good. Three men can handle one fairly easily. They may not be able to handle two at all—especially with whip and sizzle salesmen around, and sellers of dreams working to windward.

We put Ferralli beside Meeres, and searched the place carefully. We recognized one more face, and Willis said roughly, "What'll *you* have? Back to the ship, or more fun here?"

The voice said weakly, "Back to the ship, sir—but not yet, please... *Don't go, sir!*"

Willis had turned away. "Make up your mind."

"I *want* to go back—but I can't move. My insides are all floating around loose, sir."

This seemed like something in Meeres' line, and we figured we ought to get some use out of him, so we lugged him over. Then we put Ferralli down on the other side of Meeres, so if he needed medical help, he'd have it, too. We promised them we'd be around, and moved off a little distance.

Schmidt glanced back at them dubiously, "That's after the *beginning* of one night in

this place. What's it going to be like tomorrow morning?"

"Let's not even think about it. Let's just hope no one gets into one of those 'sizzle palaces.'"

We spent most of the night alternately checking the three sick crewmen, and hunting for others outside. We didn't see another crewman, so we took turns getting some sleep, and let the patrolling lapse till around dawn, then we went out again.

There in the gutter lay a wreck with a snake's head sticking out of its pocket. Nearby lay another with one hand clutching the tail of an imitation alligator. They looked as if they had been connected up with a vacuum hose, and everything inside had been sucked out.

Our other three crewmen had now come to enough to stagger around, so we put them to work.

Around noon, we finally got the whole sorry lot ferried back up to *Starlight*. Engstrom piloted the tender, and helped care for the men, but he flatly refused to even set foot on the planet.

Since the ship had to be run somehow, we put everybody capable of standing back on the job. It was a demonstration of the power of pure habit and believe me, we were nervous for fear it would give way, and land us in a still worse mess.

"Well," said Engstrom soberly, "let's hope we don't go by *that* planet again for a while."

Even after everything that had happened, the memory of that gorgeous blonde still bothered me. Half-joking, I said, "If I'd thought of it in time, I'd have taken a memento along with me. That place shouldn't object to a little kidnaping."

Engstrom gave me a brief sharp suspicious look, then he shook his head. "It wouldn't work." He added, "If you think you've done the right thing, be grateful for that."

"Unfortunately, I don't feel that sense of achievement that should follow doing the right thing."

"Well, remember, you've just been through a trial by silk. An *ordeal*. You don't feel good after undergoing an ordeal."

I shrugged. "Silk is soft."

"Do you think everything soft is necessarily harmless?" He nodded toward a kind of human shambles drifting past in the corridor. "What's the difference whether an enemy disables you by attack, or by leading you to dissipate your strength?"

I frowned. "I've heard of trial by fire, trial by water, and of trial by combat. I never heard of *trial by silk*."

Engstrom nodded. "What they wanted in the old days was to test some individual's supposed merit, and do it fast. Naturally, they weren't interested in this method. Trial by silk applies to whole civilizations even better than to individuals, it takes a surplus of ease and luxury to carry it out, and it's usually slow.

"However," he said, "never underestimate it. Whatever method beats you, the result is the same. You're beat. And if it happens pleasantly enough, you don't even realize what's happening, so you aren't warned."

Another wreck shambled past in the corridor, there was a crash and a yell, and Meeres hurried by with a hypo-gun in one hand.

"I think I see what you mean," I said slowly.

Engstrom nodded. "Enough pleasure is like so many wet sheets wrapped around a man. He generally can't even do anything to get loose."

Then Engstrom's face reddened slightly, and he cleared his throat.

"However," he said, "this is no easy thing to explain."

—Christopher Anvil

I'm Too Big But I Love To Play JAMES TIPTREE, JR.

Illustrated by MICHAEL HINGE

There can be no meaningful communication between genuine aliens—one must remake itself into an analogue of the other, in order to share systems, affinity and experience. James Tiptree, Jr. tells here a powerful and moving story about exactly that.

SORRY, JACK. You're right. Yes, I'm upset—no, it's not the campaign, for God's sake the campaign is perfect. It's not the crowds, either—I love them, Jack, you know that. Strain, sure it's a strain, but—

Jack. Listen. *Frightened*. That's what happened to Manahasset. Scared out of my mind. Because of, because of this feeling. I get this sensation. Too big! Every time now when things are going well, when I'm getting to them—the rapport, it's *working*—all of a sudden this awful build-up starts, this sensation I'm swelling up, too big. Terribly, ghastly Too Big! Listen, Jack: *Brain tumor*.

Brain tumor . . . I *can't* go to a goddamn doctor now, there's no way, they'd find out. I can't tell Ellen. I can't—Started? Oh, Christ, I know exactly when it started, it started after the Tobago weekend. At Tobago. That night. I know you cautioned me. But all I did was swim out and loaf around. Unwind. By myself. I had to, Jack. But that's when it started. The Monday after, at the Biloxi airport. You remember, I cut it off fast. That was the first. The mayor, and that clod from

Memphis, Dick Thing, you know, and they were shouting questions, and the crowd started singing, and all of a sudden, Jack, I looked over at the mayor and you. And you were about three feet high, both of you. And the plane. Tiny! I *couldn't* get into it. And this feeling, this churning—

Jack. Don't. I know about infantile omnipotence. You don't suddenly get delusions of infantile omnipotence at eleven-fifty on a Monday in Biloxi airport. Not unless there's something physical. It's physical, Jack. The bigness, the swelling, the—vortex—like I'm starting to *explode*, Jack. It's got to be brain—

Alone of his kind, perhaps, he did not outgrow joy. Play-joy in the crowded galaxies, the nursery of his race. Others matured soon away from the pleasures of time and space and were to be found immensely solitary, sailing the dimensionless meadows beyond return. They did not know each other, nor he them. How could they? For him, still the star-tangles. To ride—how rich-riding the—

swirling currents between the stars! How various, the wild-swarm photons upon his sensors! And games could be invented: For example—delicious!—to find some solitary little sizzler and breast close against its radiance, now tacking artfully, now close-hauled in the shadow of a planet, and then out again to strive closer and closer to the furious little body, to gain the corona itself, to poise, gather—and then let go! Let all go! All sailing nucleus over ganglia out and out in a glory-rush—until that sun's energy met another's, and he was swept whirling down the star-streams to flounder roiled in some sidereal Sargossa.

Here he would preen and sort his nearly immaterial vastness, amusing himself with bizarre energetic restructurings, waiting for a new photon-eddy to catch his vectors and billow him off again.

Sometimes what served him for perception gave him news that a young one of his kind was—or had been—following him. This lasted but briefly. They could not match his skill and would soon veer off. Of his equals he saw none. Was he alone of his age in his preoccupations? It did not occur to him to wonder. No member of his race had ever exchanged information. That he might be alone in his joy of exostructure he did not know nor care, but played.

New games: Resting behind a ball of matter on his approach to a red sun, his temporary nucleus snug in the shadow, his perimeter feathering out past the system turbulence—it occurred to him to invest his receptors more closely round the little ball's surface. What he sensed there diverted him. Energy distributions—but tiny! And how complex!

He curled more closely around it, concentrating himself to the density of a noisy vacuum. Here was an oddity indeed: pockets of negative entropy! To him, as to all his race, the elaboration and permutation



mile fringe

of field-energies was life. But he had never before conceived of energy-interaction of this density. To *conceive*, with him, was not a passivity, but a modeling. A restructurement into knowing. He hauled in a half-parsec of immaterial relatedness and began ineptly to experiment. Scarcely had he begun to concentrate before an incautious unbalancement exposed him to the red sun's wind and sent him sweeping out of the system with his ganglia in disarray.

But what passed for memory among his kind persisted, and now and again he would hover to inspect a likely lump. And he found, Oh, attractive, the patterns! A vast gamesomeness grew in him; he played Maxwell's demon with himself, concentrating, differentiating, sub-streaming complex energy interchanges. Skill mounted, fed back to structure. He tackled subtle challenges. And on planetary surfaces where scaled, skinned or furred creatures focussed dim sense-organs on the skies, one and another across the galaxy would be shaken by the sight of incorporealities vastwaving among the stars.

Shaken, more especially, when they could recognise monstrous auroral versions of themselves. For technique was coming to obsess him. What had been play was becoming art. Until the time when he was fashioning—without in the least knowing it—a Sirian monitor shrimp family. The tension was great, and at its peak a resonance somehow ignited and held through the glorious, backlash of release: Greater feats! Were they possible?

A new era of experimentation opened and claimed him.

High on the dunes of Lake Balkhash Natalie Brezhnovna Suitlov surveyed the beach, which was unfortunately deserted.

Natalie cocked her white-blond Baltic head. From the far side of the dune, faint but throbbing: Music.

Natalie strolled a bit higher, studying the lake. She paused. Face sun-rapt, she stretched prolongedly. Then one hand dropped absently to the knot of her diaper. With fluent ease, first the diaper and then Natalie dropped from sight into a hollow.

Here she disposed her bronze body for maximum sun. The music ceased. Natalie hummed a few beats, husky but true.

From the far side of the dune came a scrabbling. Natalie's eyelids drooped. A bullet-shaped shadow appeared in the grass at the top of the dune. Natalie's expression became very severe.

For a long moment the tension-system held beautifully. The receptors in the bullet-head belonging to Timofaev Gagarin Ponamorenko focussed upon Natalie. Natalie radiated strongly back. The system grew, recruited.

Then action became imperative. Timofaev gave a perfunctory glance around—and inhaled yelpingly.

A hundred metres up the little ridge something huge was happening. Part of it was a gassy figure resting on the ground in Natalie's same posture. It was Natalie—but fifty metres long and obscenely distorted. Giant-Natalie solidified, took on color. But it was not alone! On the ridge above it, a great head—Timofaev's head—and his hands—and—

Natalie herself was up in a crouch and staring too. The giant head of Timofaev lacked hair, the hands lacked arms, they were floating in the air. And floating behind them were other portions of Timofaev, some unrecognisable, some plain as a pikestaff—those portions of his being which had been energetically and reciprocally resonant with Natalie.

The youngsters screamed together and

the monstrous images began to boil. Sand, air and grass rose whirling, and the dune imploded round them in thunder—

**SOMETHING WRONG! WITHDRAW!
REDEFINE SYSTEM!**

Guerero Galvan swung his legs against his burro and gazed sourly down into the great barranca beside the trail. He was hot and dry and dusty. When he was rich he would ride to Xochimilicho in a private aeroplane. But when he was rich he would not live in Xochimilicho. Very surely, he would live in a concrete palace full of girls at Mazatlan, by the sea. The sea? Guerero considered the sea. He had never seen it. But all ricos loved the sea. The sea was full of girls. The burro hobbled on. Guerero kicked it reflexively, squinting at the trail ahead.

Coming toward him was another rider.

Guerero prodded his mount. The trail was narrow here, and the stranger was large. He too was prodding his mount, Guerero saw. But where had he come from? The trail had been clear to the pass a few moments before. He must have dozed.

As they came abreast Guerero raised three fingers in a studiously casual greeting. The stranger did likewise. Guerero came fully awake, began to stare. There was something odd here. A diligent student of the mirror, Guerero saw that the stranger, though larger, looked very much like himself.

"Bueno," he muttered, tracing his own dark, slightly adenoidal features, his own proud gold glitter of biscuspid. And the burro—the same, the same tattered blanket—He crossed himself.

"Bueno," said the stranger, and crossed himself.

Guerero took one long look and began to scream prayers, hauling, wrestling his

animal, flailing his legs. Next moment he had leaped free and was racing down the trail.

The voice had been his own voice, but it had come from the burro.

Careening, Guerero risked a look behind and redoubled his speed. The false Guerero-devil was trying to dismount too—but the flesh of its legs seemed to be joined to the sides of the devil-burro. Behind the devils the mountain was convulsing. Guerero flung himself into a gully and cowered while trail, pass and devils vomited themselves into the sky.

**MISTAKE! WITHDRAW!
SUBCIRCUITS IMPRECISE!**

Through the noise of his party Ches Mencken was keeping one ear on the moonlit terrace. Majorca moonlight could get chilly. The three couples who had gone skinny-dipping with Elfa had come dripping and giggling back and were applying themselves to the juice. Where was Elfa?

He mixed rock-vodkas, peeking at the electronic timepiece in the wide reptilian band around his wide mammalian wrist. Thirty-five minutes. He jerked his jaw clear of the turtle-neck and pressed a glass into la Jones' steamy paw. She breathed at him. *Sorry, Jones-baby, Elfa is my score . . . Where the hell is she?*

Jones-baby gurgled through her hair. Those earrings were real.

But Elfa's got all that glue. Pity Jones doesn't fall on his head and leave you with the basic Xerox, things might be different for you and me, know that?

Automatically his eyes gave her the message: *You—me—different—*

Only it wouldn't be, he thought. It'd be the same old ratass. Christ but he was tired!

Tired. Young, old, soft, sinewy, bouncy, bony, wriggly, lumpy, slimy, lathery, leathery, squeaking shrieking growling—all of them after him, his furry arms, his golden masculinity, his expert—*Oh Ches I've never Oh Ches it's so it's Oh Ches Oh Darling darling darlingdarlingdarling—*

Wonder what it'd be like to go gay? Restful, maybe, he brooded, checking bottles. Better yet, go off the juice onto pot. They say you don't, with pot. After he landed Elfa that's what he'd do: Go on pot and retire. Surprise for Elfa. Only, where was Elfa?

Oh God no.

A pale form was wavering about the moonlit terrace. Not a stitch on and slugged. She must have had a bottle down there.

He disengaged fast and raced around through the bedroom, snatching up a rebozo.

"Darling you'll get chilled!" Capturing her in the wool lace, leading her into the bedroom. She was slugged all right but not out.

"Don't know . . . clothes? What this?"

"Warm you, doll. What a doll, num-num—"

Automatically moving in, his expert hands. *Really a damn good stack for her age, she's kept herself up . . . Careful, now. Mustn't upset her. With Elfa it's got to be love.*

Elfa is special. Elfa is the retirement plan.

"Ches!"

"I'll be good,"

"No, I mean, I feel so—Ches!"

"Little doll, you're so—"

"Ches, so intimate, I never—I mean, I loved Maxwell terribly, you know, I did, Ches?"

"Dear little heart, you—"

"But he never, I never! Oh, Ches—"

Oh God it was the pitch, he saw, and that

damn crowd outside. They'd have to go. Life or death.

"—Drink this down for Ches, Ches wants you to drink it so you won't get chilled, see? My little girl sit down right here just one minute, Ches is coming right back—"

"Ches—"

As he closed the door she was saying plaintively, "Ches, did you ever, ~~so~~ big? So terribly, terribly—"

Somehow he got them out. She was sipping and crooning to herself where he'd put her.

"Li'l bitsy!"

"Little heart."

"Ches! Li'l bitsy moon!"

"Li'l bitsy you, m'm m'm," taking the glass. Carrying her to the bed, she saying again, "Ches, I'm so big! Li'l you!"

He didn't hear her. This was serious, this was make or break. She'd remember tomorrow, all right. It had to be the big thing. Was she too drunk? Her head lolled. *O Jesus.* But his technique was good. Presently he knew he needn't have worried. She was coming into it beautifully, puffing and panting. The nose knows. Mellow relief—he was good. *Maybe I should be some kind of guru, give lessons.*

She was gabbling incoherently now. Suddenly plain:

"Oh Ches I'm getting bigger!" *Real panic?*

"It's good, Honey," he panted. "It's what's happening, let it happen, let it happen to you—"

He didn't register the white figure wavering on the terrace outside until it stumbled into the glass and began to mouth. Foggy, blurry—it was Elfa out there! *How Elfa? No! ELFA?*

He jerked as the thrashing in his arms went rigid, arched.

"Ches I'm go-oo-ing explo-OO-OOO—"

Under intolerable stress the nebulous

extension which had been compressed into a mimic of the woman by the water reverted to its original state. A monstrous local discontinuity comprising—among other things—the subatomic residuals of an alligator watchband bloomed into the thermosphere from the Majorca cliffs.

NEW ERROR! COMMUNICATION?
OOH HOW MORE?

Standing on the wet rocks, he laughed. Laughing he laughed more. To feel! To know feeling! To know knowing! A past flooded in on him, voices—speech-patterns—events—concepts—MEANING. Laughter roared.

The little sub-system was right! It worked. It lived.

But the little system was not right. The system was under strain, it demanded closure. It demanded to be itself, be whole. A part of it was outside, disequilibrating it, intruding alien circuits. The little system had integrity, it would not be a subsystem. It fought the disequilibrium, hauled and pulled on the incongruent gap.

He fought back, idly at first. Then strenuously, fighting to keep his nucleus outside, to retain the system/sub-system hierarchy. It was too late, no good.

Soundless as a soap-film snapping, the great field reorganized. The system inverted, closed and came to equilibrium with everything crammed in.

But it was not the same equilibrium.

The moonlit surf creamed and hissed quietly around the rocks at his feet. Something he did not examine floated further out. After a moment he lifted his head to watch the little moon slicing cirrus cloud. The breeze dried his skin. He felt an extraordinary . . . pleasure? Pride?

Perhaps that he was still young enough to break a business trip with an impromptu swim?

He began to climb up the rocks. Beneath the pleasure was something else. Pain! Why was he so confused? Why had he come here? Surely not just for an idle swim. Not now. But yet he was happy. He let himself slide into pleasure as he found his clothes, dressed. Dressing himself was actively enjoyable; he'd never noticed. A moment of panic seized him as he climbed back to Overlook 92 where he had left his car. But it was there, safe. With his briefcase.

The image of the swirling surf, the streaming clouds roiled in his mind as he drove, merged with the swirl of the car as the huge coastal cloverleaf carried him up and around over and dip down through the mercury light flashing—sweeping—

Oooo-oooo-oooo! went his signaller. As his power cut the cop rolled in beside him. He answered automatically, produced his papers. The interchange excited him. It seemed delicious to see the cop's thick lips murmuring into his 'corder. From ID card through the eyes through the brain through the sound-waves through the 'corder tape pulse—

"Who reads the tape?" he asked.

The officer stared at him, tight-lipped.

"Does a human being listen to it? Or does it go to another machine?"

"Where did you say you're going, Doctor, uh, Mitchell?"

"I told you. San Berdoo Research. My meeting up north ended early, I decided to drive back. Fine night."

In fact, he remembered now, he had been unspeakably depressed.

"Doing one fifty in a ninety kay-em zone. Keep it down." The cop turned away.

Mitchell—he was Mitchell—drove on frowning. His dashboard needles fanned, dial lights blinked. Giving him information. The car communicated with him, one way. Whether it wanted to or not.

I was like the car, he thought. He made

me communicate with him one-way. There was a roiling inside him. Where is the circuit, he wondered.

He raced on through the night, communications springing at him. Right lane must turn right, he read. Food gas lodging next exit. His black mood lifted. Green-to-red, green-to-amber, flashing-amber All night funeral home. He laughed aloud.

He was still grinning when the garage opened to his beeper and the house door opened to his thumb. The house was dark, silent. He expected that, he realised. His wife was visiting her mother. *Eleanor*.

But his wife's name was not Eleanor, his wife was Audrey.

Depression descended. Suddenly he saw he had been evading reality. Swimming and playing games with the cops instead of doing the serious thinking he had planned to do. Before tomorrow's meeting.

He turned out the lights and lay on the bed, trying to concentrate. There were paragraphs in his mind. Other things. He must concentrate. The moon set. It grew darker, and presently, very slowly, lighter. He failed to notice that he did not sleep. When the little sun rose he got up and re-dressed.

The San Berdoo lot was still quite empty when he pulled in; the guards seemed surprised to see him. His office, though, was sunny. Did not need light. He found the files.

His secretary came in at eight-thirty, tip-toeing.

"Miss Mulm," he said brightly. He pushed the files away.

"Yes sir?" She was instantly wary, a small, dark, soft-lipped girl.

"Sir?" he echoed. "Indicating deference, subordination . . . are you afraid of me, Miss Mulm?"

"Why, no, Dr. Mitchell." Staring

gravely, shaking her dark head.

"Good. There's too much of that sort of thing. Too much one-way communication. No true interaction. Entropic. Don't you feel it?"

"Well, I guess . . . uh—"

"Miss Mulm. You've been with me five years now. Since before I was Director. You came over from the department with me."

She nodded, watching him intently. Yes.

"Have you any feelings about the sort of work we do here?"

"What do you mean, Doctor Mitchell, feelings?"

"Do you—Well, do you approve of it?"

She was silent. Wary. But somehow brimming.

"I—Of course I don't understand all of it, not really understand. But it—it seems more military than I expected. I mean, Colonel Morelake, I guess—"

"And you don't feel quite right about military-type research?"

"Oh, Doctor Mitchell," she said desperately, "if you think it's all right—"

Her eyes, face brimmed, communicating information.

"My God," he said slowly, studying her. "Do you think I think—does everybody here think I—no. You can't answer that, of course. I guess I, since Hal's been away I've been doing some—" He broke off.

"Miss Mulm! Does it strike you that we are engaged in a most peculiar interaction process?"

She made a helpless confused noise.

"On the one hand we're discussing, verbally, the work of this institution. And at the same time there is another quite different communication taking place between us. Without words. Are you aware of that? I feel it has been going on for some time, too. Don't you think so? By the way, my name is Colin."

"I know," she said, suddenly not

confused at all.

He came closer and slowly, experimentally reached his hands and arms out along the force-lines of the emergent system. The system of two.

"Eleanor," he said. The system tightened, connected body to body, changing both. His body began to move along the field stresses. It felt wonderful. It felt resonant. Resonances tuned, building to oscillation. Feedback began to drive—swelled stress—

"Eleanor!" He was galvanised with delicious danger. "Eleanor—I—"

"Yes Colin!" Brimming at him, five years of small dark very intense—

"I—I—I—" Bracing against the forcefield's bulge, "*What?*"

"The intercom! They—they—It's time, Doctor Mitchell!"

"Oh." It was flashing, buzzing, down there very small and far away. The . . . The meeting. Yes. What the hell had hit him. Damp. Damp the circuits. The room came back. And the paragraphs.

He was quite himself when the staff meeting opened. The project leaders, as usual, led off with their reports. There were eighteen bodies and an empty chair: The fourteen project directors, Admin, Security, Colonel Morelake, himself and the empty chair for his deputy, Hal, on leave at Aspen. The reports were officially being made to him, as Director, but most of the speakers seemed to be speaking directly to Colonel Morelake. Again as usual.

Jim Morelake bore a disarming resemblance to a robin. A slim, neat robin with a perfectly good PhD and lots of charm. He bobbed his head in obviously genuine interest at each report. When old Pfaffman got into a tangled complaint—this time to Mitchell—Morelake spoke up.

"Colin, I believe I know where we can get some computer time to help Max."

Pfaffman grunted without looking at him and subsided.

That wound up the routine. They looked at Mitchell.

"About Cal Tech-North," Mitchell said. "I spent over six hours with Will Tenneman yesterday, before and after the general meeting. Essentially he was very ready to deal, provided we can work out the details of the grant allocations, and I feel they'll be reasonable. In fact, there was so little to talk over until we get down to specifics that I came back early. I think the main thing that was worrying him was parking space."

That brought the ritual chuckle.

"However," Mitchell went on. "There's something bothering me. This business brings it to a head. The Cal Tech North link-up is completely logical and desirable, *provided* we continue as we have been going. I'd like to do a little review. As you all know, especially those of you who have been here from the start—" He paused, momentarily aware of how many new faces were around him.

"This group was set up as an independent research facility annex to the university proper. It was our role to service a wide spectrum of basic research projects which could attract special funding arrangements. We started with eight projects. Two were medical, one was a short-term data analysis on traffic fatalities, another was historical, two were interdepartment teams in the anthro-sociology area, one was concerned with human developmental and learning processes, and one was an applied project in education. Of these, four were funded by N.I.H., one by private industry, one by the Department of Commerce, one by N.S.F., and one by the Department of Defense. Right?"

A few heads nodded, old Pfaffman's the hardest. Two of the younger men were staring oddly.

"At the present time," Mitchell went on, "we have increased to fourteen projects in hand. There has been a threefold increase in personnel, and a commensurate growth in support facilities. Of these fourteen projects, one is funded by N.I.H., three by private industry, and Commerce is still continuing the traffic study. The rest, that is nine, are funded by the Department of Defense."

He paused. The empty chair beside him seemed to be significant. Things were different without Hal. He had chosen Hal, relied on him as an energiser. And yet—was it since Hal's time that the D.O.D. connections had tightened?

"Everyone is, of course, very pleased," he said heavily. "But I wonder how many of us have taken time to analyse these projects, which we live with daily. If you stand back, as I have been doing over this past week, and classify them very naively from the standpoint of their ultimate product, I think it is fair to say that five of them have no conceivable application except as means to injure or destroy human life. Three more probably have no other application, although they may yield a small return in basic knowledge. That's eight. Number nine is devoted to the remote electrical control of human behavior. Ten and eleven are exploring faster means for the sterilisation of plants. Twelve and thirteen are limited engineering problems in metallic structure. The last is one of the original—I might say, surviving—projects concerned with human cognitive development."

That was Pfaffman. He was looking at his hands.

"When we link up with Cal Tech North," Mitchell went on, "*When and if* we link up with Cal Tech North, this imbalance will be intensified. I am not familiar with their entire panel, since so much of it is classified.

But they are *entirely* funded by D.O.D."

The silence was absolute. Colonel Morelake's eyes were on the table, his expression attentive. Even sympathetic.

Mitchell took a breath. Up to now his voice had been light and controlled, as if reciting a long-prepared speech. He went on, still quietly.

"I would like to have your comments."

One or two heads moved. Feet shifted. One of the younger men—the neural impulse broadcaster—let his teeth click audibly. No one said a word.

The pulse under Mitchell's ear began to pound. The wrangles—the free-for-alls that had gone on around this table! How had he let things drift so far? He leaned back, nudging the empty chair.

"I'm surprised," he said, still mildly. "Let me remind you of the way we set up. Perhaps some of you haven't read the charter. It calls for periodic reviews of our program—our *whole* program—giving each of you as project heads a voice, a vote if you like, in evaluating what it regrettably refers to as the *thrust* or the *social impact* of our work. As Director, I have two votes—three, with Hal away. Gentlemen, I am calling for your evaluations."

Three men cleared their throats simultaneously. Mitchell looked toward Bill Enders, one of the phytocide biologists.

"Well, Colin," Enders said awkwardly. "Each of these projects *was* discussed, at the time of initiation. I . . . I frankly don't quite see—?"

There were several nods, a shuffling release of tension. Morelake, as a non-voting consultant, kept his eye on his papers throughout.

Mitchell drew a breath.

"I confess I am surprised that no one sees anything to discuss here." His voice sounded oddly thick in his own ears.

"Colin." A crisp voice: Chan Boden,

biochemist. The oldest man present, bar Pfaffman, with a lush, long-term grant.

"One sees what you mean, of course, Colin. These problems in values, social responsibility. It's always been a difficult aspect. I'm sure all of us maintain awareness of, for example, the triple-A. S. ventilations of the problem. In our private lives," he smiled, "we all undoubtedly do a bit of soul-searching from time to time. But the point is that *here*, in our professional personae, we are scientists."

The magic word; there was audible relaxation.

"That is exactly the point." Mitchell's voice was dead level. "*We are scientists.*" This too was in the paragraphs, this had been expected. But why were the paragraphs fading? Something about the way they refused to respond. He shook his head, heard himself plowing on.

"Are we doing *science*, here? Let's get down to basics. Are we adding to man's sum total knowledge? Is knowledge merely a collection of recipes for killing and subjugating men, for eliminating other species? A computerised stone axe? I'm not talking about the horrors of gore and bloodshed, mind you. The hell with that—some bloodshed may be a fine thing, I don't know. What I mean—"

He leaned forward, the paragraphs all gone now, the pound in his neck building.

"Entropy! The development of reliable knowledge is anti-entropic. Science's task in a social system is comparable to the function of intelligence in the individual. It holds against disorganisation, oscillation, noise, entropy. But we, here—we've allied ourselves with an entropic subsystem. We're not generating structure, we're helping to degrade the system!"

They were staring, rigid.

"Are you accusing me of being a virus particle, Colin?" Jim Morelake asked

gently.

Mitchell turned on him, eager for connection. The room seemed momentarily clearer.

"All right, Jim, if you're their spokesman now. You must see it. The military argument—biotic agents—because the other side has. Mutagenesis—because they may get it first. But they know we do it, and so they— Christ! This is at the ten-year-old level. Runaway forward oscillation!"

He was fighting himself now, peering down at the dwindling table.

"You're a scientist, Jim. You're too good a man to be used that way."

Morelake regarded him gravely. Beside him Jan Evans, an engineer, cleared his throat.

"If I understand you, Colin—and I'm not sure that I do—perhaps it might help if you gave us an example of the kind of project you feel is, ah, anti-entropic?"

Mitchell saw Pfaffman freeze. Was the old man afraid he would cite his work? *Afraid?* The awful churning rose in his gut.

"Right," he said clumsily. "Of course, one can't, at a moment's notice but here— Communication! Two-way communication. Interlocking flow." He felt suddenly better. "You can understand why a system would seek information—but why in hell does it *offer* information? Why do we strive to be understood? Why is a refusal to accept communication so painful? Look at it—a process that ties the whole damn human system together, and *we don't know fact one about it!*"

This was good! Panting with relief, shining-eyed, Mitchell searched from face to face for what must be coming. At the edge of his mind he noticed the Admin man was by the door. He didn't count.

"Fascinating idea, Colin," Morelake said pleasantly. "I mean, it truly is seminal. But let's go back one moment. What exactly are

you suggesting that we do?"

Annoyance tugging at him. Why didn't the others speak? Something wrong. The swelling feeling came back, rose hard.

"That we stop all this," he said thickly. "Close out the damned projects and kiss off D.O.D. Forget Cal Tech North. Get out and hustle some real research."

Someone gave a snort of amusement. Mitchell looked round slowly in the silence. Somewhere down there, the little faces—hard and blank as that cop's. Only old Pfaffman, and the lad whose teeth clicked; they looked scared. The swirling grew inside him, the pound of seeking resonance. Why would they not respond? Mesh, relieve the charge that was hunting wildly in him, straining the system?

"*You won't even discuss it,*" he said with terrible urgency. Dimly he saw that two little guards had come into the shrinking room.

"Colin, this is very painful," said Morelake's voice from the pulsing rail.

"You're going to pretend I'm sick," his own voice rattled. The guards were closing on him, reaching out. Faces were in the doorway now. A small dark head. Incongruous newspaper in her hand: Eleanor Mulm had been reading that the nude body of a man identified as Dr. Colin Mitchell had been found on the rocks below coastal lookout 92.

"Believe me, Colin, this is very painful," Morelake was saying to the choking thing that looked like Mitchell.

"Entropy!" it gasped, fighting hard. "We must not!"

The guards touched him. The human circuits—the marvelously dense gestalt he had modeled from the man-system floating in the sea—retained its human integrity long enough to make him yell:

"ELEANOR! RUN! RU—UU—UU—"

And the strained equilibrium ruptured.

The huge energy which had been stressed into the atomic lattice of a human body reverted back to immaterial relatedness and blossomed toward Vega from a point in Lower California. The resulting implosion degraded much of San Bernadino County, including Colonel Morelake, Pfaffman, the S.B.R. Institute, and Eleanor Mulm.

—and he came finally to equilibrium among the stars.

But it was not the same equilibrium.

What served him for memory had learned the circuitry of self-consciousness. What served him as emotion had sampled the wonder of communication between systems, the sharing of structure.

Alone of his lonely race, he had touched and been touched, essayed to speak and been heard.

Re-forming himself, he perceived that the nuclear portions of his being were still caught against the little planet by the solar wind—naturally, since the eversion had occurred at noon. It was no trouble to balance there on the standing wave.

He considered for a time, as his distributions stabilized. Then zestfully, for he was a joyful being, he let the radiance take him, swerved out and around to the haven of the planet's shadow. Here he hung idly, his immense periphery feathered out to the nearby stars. He preened new structural resonances, tickled by wandering wavicles.

Then he began to scan the planetary surface, tasting, savoring the play of tiny structurances. But it was different now. Somewhere in his field gradients, impalpable residuals of the systems he had copied lingered on. An astronomer in the Andes, found something like a burro on his plates of the Coalsack and chewed out his darkroom aid. A Creek farmer saw the letters *E L E A* glimmering in Scorpio, and carried corn and laurel to a certain cave.

The planet turned, the continents passed into the shadow where he hung, a lonely vastness slightly more than a vacuum. Playing his random scan, relishing energetic intricacies. Feeling in what was not a heart a huge and capricious yearning which built and feaded erratically, now so faint that he let himself diffuse almost to where the currents would whirl him eternities away, now so strong that he focussed to a point on one human creature alone for a moment in the open night.

Temptation grew, faded, grew in him again. Would he? Again? . . . He would. Which? Water; they were often by water, he had found. But which? This one, who played . . . was it *music*? . . . on the shore? It would be, he decided, a communicator. The world turned, carried the music-maker away. One who . . . spoke? . . . and was received, respoken. A linker. One-one? Or why not one-many? Was it possible? Restlessly, he drew a few parsecs of himself into the system, spelled *D. O. D.* in colliding photons, and began more intently to search for something to become.

Everything gets small. It's so real. Headaches? No, no headaches. Why? No colored haloes on things, either. And no anger. Personality change? I wouldn't know, would I? You be the judge. I don't think so. Except for the fear. Jack, I tell you, it's physical. The interaction starts, the rapport—that terrific feeling that we're really communicating—all those people, I'm *with* them. Agh, we don't have words for it. Do we? And then this thing starts, this swelling—no, the bigness, I mean *big*, Jack, big like bigger than houses, bigger than the sun maybe! Like the interaction feeds it, it's going to burst, it's going to kill everybody—

All right, Jack. All right. If you think so. I know it sounds crazy, that's why— Do you honestly? Think so? That's true, I *don't* have headaches. I've heard that too. Maybe I— Of course, I know I can't quit now. You're so right. But I've got to steal a day off, Jack. Cancel something. Cancel that Dartmouth thing, it's entropic anyway. Useless, I mean. We've got to take a day and hole up somewhere and rest. You're right, Jack. You fix it. Before we tackle Chicago.

—tumor. That's what scares me.

—James Tiptree, Jr.

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The Tree Terror

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Foreword

ALL biological activities are governed by natural laws which are the end results of countless centuries of trial, success and failure, experimentation. Forms of life have developed in response to changed climate and environment, have reached an apparent perfection of adaptability and specialization, and, then, have died rapidly, because of an absolute inability to adapt their manner of living to new and unusual conditions.

But these changes have been slow in the time element and there have always been some life types that were able to survive, mainly due to their ability to change and to a sufficient number of generations for making the necessary alterations in structure.

Two possibilities confront humanity of the present age.

Is it possible that science will develop some new force, hitherto unknown, which will accomplish in a generation changes that heretofore might have taken a million years? Granted that such a power would be unintentionally discovered and liberated, would mankind be able to adjust himself with sufficient rapidity to maintain his place of supremacy on this planet?

So far, man has developed upward. In spite of every climatic change, in

spite of disease, in spite of famine and unnecessary wars, the human race has survived. He has lived on, because he has been adaptable. But in every instance the time element has been in his favor. Man was able to live through the rigors of the glacial period, but he had over nine hundred thousand years to become accustomed to the changes in temperature. What would have been the result if the glacial invasion had reached its height in ninety years?

The scientist, made grandiose by countless successes, is talking of harnessing the tides, of changing the Gulf Stream, and of completely changing types of life in one generation. What if he succeeds?

THE President of Cellulose Consolidated was worried: There had not been a period when the demand for cellulose had been as large as it was now. From a hundred different industries came orders of the greatest importance. The scientist of every nation was turning to plant life for the basic material necessary for the manufacturing of a thousand synthetic products. Pulp paper forests, corn stalks, sugar cane, cotton plants and even goldenrod and milkweed had been commercialized to the utmost, but, the demand for cellulose far exceeded the supply.

"And it is not because there is not enough land!" thundered Timothy Tompkins to his Board of Specialists. "There are, in the United States, millions of acres of uncultivated land that could be bought for a song. Plants grow on land; all you have to do is to find the plant. Better get busy! If you men lack the necessary intelligence and imagination, I can easily replace you."

Simcox, one of the horticulturists, became indignant.

"You are wrong, Mr. Tompkins, and I am going to say so, even if you discharge me the next minute. The reason there are millions of uncultivated lands in the United States is simply the fact that nothing will grow there. The land is poor, and there is no water."

"No water?"

"Yes, lots of it, but it is thirty to a hundred feet below the surface. Any man can put down a pipe and pump it up, but it will evaporate before it spreads over five acres. You cannot put water on those deserts fast enough to do any good."

"How about the irrigation of the date palms in the Imperial Valley? Water does good there, does it not?"

"Yes; but there the water is piped to the roots of each individual tree. You cannot grow cellulose that way. It would be too slow, too expensive. I will tell you how to grow cellulose in the middle of the Sahara desert, but it will cost so much that you would not want a second ton produced."

"All you say is true, Simcox, and I am not going to argue with you. But I am going to tell you, and all of the rest of this high salaried Board, one thing. I must have more cellulose, lots more, and it has to be produced at a low price per ton and near enough to our factories so that the freight will not be an expensive item. Now, go ahead with the problem. If you fail, you're fired.

That statement goes better than a hundred arguments. I am not a scientist, just a business man. I hire intelligence. When I do not get my money's worth, it is just too bad for the experts. My advice to you is to get busy or get out!"

That ended the argument.

Simcox, doing all he could, could see no solution. He talked plants, thought plants, even dreamed of plants. One dream was especially terrible. He fancied a world of plants, growing rapidly, fighting each other for root room, stretching upward towards the sun through dismal dank forests, reaching an early maturity and rotting, only to furnish food for their children and grandchildren. He dreamed of a world so overgrown with vegetation that few other forms of life could exist, a world where every drop of moisture was sucked out of the ground, carried up the trunks of trees, dissipated into the air to be returned in a perpetual rain. He awoke in a shivering sweat.

"That dream is a memory!" he whispered to himself as he shaved. "Such a world existed at some time. I must find out more about it."

He told the dream to a friend who happened to be a palæo-botanist. The man laughed at the dream and inquiry.

"I AM surprised at your question, Simcox. Of course you are not as well acquainted with the past plant life as you are with the present. Your dream is a rather vivid description of the earth during the Carboniferous Age of the late Palaeozoic Period. The earth was a swamp; the climate was hot, almost steamy, and rain fell most of the time. Tree ferns, club mosses, and trees that later became conifers grew in lush profusion. The scale tree, *Lepidodendrom*, the seal tree, *Sigillaria*, club mosses a hundred feet high and *Cordaites* fought each other for the right to live, for water

to drink, and for a place in the sun. There were a few insects, some amphibians and occasionally a primitive reptile. You read the description in a book, forgot it, and then recalled it in a dream. All very simple."

"But what became of them? What was the end of such giant vegetation? Ferns a hundred feet high? Moss as tall or taller?"

Again the specialist laughed.

"They fell to the ground and changed into coal. I can show you hundreds of their pictures in the rocks of the coal beds, fossils of their trunks, their leaves and even their spores. We have ferns and moss now, but all those giant forms are gone—forever."

"What a world that would have been for the Boss!" exclaimed Simcox. "It would have given him all the cellulose he could have used. Of course, we know about mosses and ferns to-day, but our plant would use a year's supply of such little things in one day. It would just be aggravating. If we cannot grow enough corn stalks in a season to satisfy his demands, why think of mosses and ferns?"

"Of course," reiterated the palaeobotanist, "those plants were very large. The club moss grew over six feet in diameter, and fully a hundred feet high. Their roots were driven into the earth to a distance of sixty feet. And it is supposed that their growth was rapid. A scale tree, a thirty meter fern, grew to maturity in a single season and died as quickly."

"ARE you sure of that?" asked Simcox.

"I think so. Of course, the only way we know about it is to compare the vegetation of that period with its descendants of our own period. That is what I used as a basis for my statement."

"There is help there for me. At least,

there is a line of investigation," sighed Simcox. "It may help me to hold my job and then again it may make the Boss think I am insane. At any rate, I am going to study the ferns and mosses. If a variety could be developed that would grow six feet in diameter and a hundred feet high in one season, it would give Cellulose Incorporated all the raw material it needed."

He started to study the lycopods. Nothing very startling there. Little flowerless herbs, with erect widely branched stems and small simple leaves, closely covering stems and branches. The fertile leaves were arranged in cones, holding spore cases in their axils. Rarely more than six inches high. The spores, falling to the ground, formed prothallium, and these, breaking up into male and female parts, caused the generation of new plants. All very simple. Nothing there he did not already know. But there was a difference between a club moss six inches high and one a hundred feet high. The difference was exactly ninety-nine and one-half feet.

No help in the club mosses to make his job a permanent one. He felt that the secret was there, but that was all. The very fact, that he felt the way he did, made him more determined than ever to learn what the secret was. He practically lived and slept with the mosses. He talked to everyone who knew anything about their mode of life and reproduction. After a few weeks of this, people began to talk about him and shook their heads in a significant manner. A good fellow gone wrong. But at last he found something. At one of the Eastern colleges a scientist was studying the effect of X-ray bombardment on the spores of ferns. Doses of 2,500 to 5,000 roentgens increased the rate and quality of growth. Doses of 7,000 to 30,000 stopped growth but did

not kill. Instead it made an occasional spore into a giant, several hundred times the average size. These gargantuan spores remained alive but did not grow.

Simcox went there. The college scientist welcomed him and told him all he knew. He opened a small pill box and showed him some of the massive spores, really little balls, but in comparison with other spores of the same plant, enormous seeds.

"Have you done anything like that with the club mosses?" asked Simcox.

"No. Only with ferns. But the same thing would happen. At least, I think so."

SIMCOX left at once. He had an idea and was afraid of talking. Strange as it might seem, he went at once to see Timothy Tompkins. He told him the story of the giant club mosses of millions of years before and the tale of the spores, made two hundred times larger than their brother spores by the action of the X-ray bombardment. Tompkins was interested.

"If you can grow me millions of club mosses each six feet in diameter and a hundred feet high, your job is saved and your salary increased ten times; how long will it take to grow just one for me?"

"It may take a year; it may take a lifetime. I told you that the college man was unable to make one of the large spores grow, didn't I?"

"I am not interested in failure," growled the President of Cellulose Consolidated. "Effort without success simply irritates me. You can have unlimited funds, and a year of time. By the end of twelve months you either will or will not make good. You can draw on me for any sum you want. If you fail, I never want to see you again. If you succeed in finding a new and unlimited source of cellulose, you will be

one of the big men in our company. Now, get out of the office! I have other things to do."

With unlimited funds at his disposal for experimental purposes, Simcox lost no time. Hundreds of plants of club-moss were irradiated. Their spore formation was studied. There was no doubt about the fact that large dosage of X-raying produced the massive type of spore which seemed capable of living indefinitely but showed no inclination to grow into new plants. There was the difficulty! How could it be shown that a larger spore produced a larger form of club moss if the spore did not grow?

Metchlinkoff, working on frog's eggs in Chicago, gave Simcox the hint. Irritation of the spore with a fine needle. That stimulated the frog egg; why not the spore of the club moss? Simcox tried it and found that it worked. Once the spore was irritated and buried in rich soil, it started to grow. The growth of the first six spores was so startling, so rapid, that Simcox closed his laboratory to all visitors, had most of his assistants transferred, and deliberately destroyed the young plants.

HE transferred his laboratory to an isolated part of Nebraska. There he had leased a two thousand acre tract. The land was rich, there was some water, the roads were poor, and there were no tourists. He re-established his laboratory, and a hundred feet from the house he planted one of the massive spores.

All he had to do was to wait. It was summer time and hot. In a week the shoot of the club moss was out of the ground. Simcox ran a water line out to the young plant and gave it water daily. At the end of the second week it was twenty feet high, one foot in diameter and gave the impression that it was far from maturity. The scientist

wasted one more week and then sent a wire to the President of Cellulose Consolidated, asking him to come out to Nebraska. The message was short but distinctly urgent. Timothy Tompkins evidently realized that Simcox had something to show him. He went to Nebraska by plane. He arrived four weeks to the day after the planting of the spore.

On the flat treeless plain of the prairie the sixty-foot tree moss stood up like a flag pole. It was now over five feet in diameter, and daily observations showed that it was still growing rapidly. Simcox took the President of his company out to the moss without a word of explanation, without even a word of welcome. He wanted Tompkins to make his own observations free from interruption from a subordinate.

Tompkins looked at the tree, felt it, took a penknife and cut into the bark. He took out a pocket magnifying glass and looked at the piece of wood in his hand. At last he turned around to his employee.

"How old is the thing, Simcox?"

"I planted the spore twenty-eight days ago."

"Have you any more of the seeds?"

"Sure! I think that I can produce them by the thousands."

"Then, what are you wasting time for? Get busy! I'll send you a hundred men. Plant ten thousands seeds, fifty feet apart, and we will see what will happen. Three months from now we ought to have a forest. Will they have seeds? Do you suppose we have a new kind of plant? If so, we will not cut a single one of them, but I will lease every piece of land for fifty miles in all directions."

"But are we sure of our finding, Mr. Tompkins? Here is one freak vegetation. How do we know that other spores will grow in the same way? How do we know that the spore from this giant

club moss will reproduce similar trees? Would it not be best to go slowly?"

"No!" thundered the President of Cellulose Consolidated. "We cannot lose a day. I have twice as many orders as we can possibly fill. If this thing is as good as it looks, it is worth the gamble. I am going to lease every inch of land I can, and you stay here and get every seed you can ready for planting. I will have a planting crew here that will do anything you tell them to."

"But how about water?"

"I'll run a pipe line from the Great Lakes if necessary. You annoy me with your timidity. Let's get this thing started."

THREE months from that time a forest of club moss trees was growing in western Nebraska. It was soon found that it was unnecessary to water them. They seemed to get all the moisture necessary from the soil and air. The first tree was now maturing and forming spores. To Simcox' delight and astonishment, these spores were as large as the ones he had first planted. Evidently the trees were able to reproduce spores as large as those activated by the X-ray. And when these were planted, their rate of observed growth exceeded, if anything, the daily growth of the present trees. The spores were carefully gathered and planted. A few of the first trees were cut down and their pulp studied for experimental purposes, but most of the old trees were allowed to stand.

At the end of a year the ranch house was in the midst of a dense forest that extended from it for twenty-five miles in all directions. All of the leased land had young trees planted on it, either by hand or by the wind. What had once been open treeless prairie was now a dense forest. Even the roads were overgrown and it was increasingly difficult

to drive a machine into the center of the growth. Men had been lost in the forest. The constant falling of old trees added to the danger.

If at that time the full import of the novelty had been recognized and corrective measures taken at once, the future terror might have been avoided. But the President of Cellulose Consolidated, not wanting to waste a single year, started similar forests in Kansas, Colorado, Arkansas and the waste lands of Louisiana. It is true that he started lumber camps on the edge of the Nebraska forest, and, for a time, was able to harvest the giant club moss trees as fast as they grew, but, even with the resources at his command, even that first forest outgrew the efforts made to convert it into commercial cellulose.

Two other factors operated unfavorably.

The spores were windblown for hundreds of miles. Where one fell it grew. Where one grew one month a thousand grew three months later. New forests developed seemingly over night. Nurseries, feeling a sure demand for the agricultural novelty, sold seeds by the hundred thousand. Landowners were advised to grow their own forests for fire wood and wind brakes. Everybody wanted to have at least one club moss tree, even if there was no other place to grow it than in the front yard.

Cut into firewood, it burned with a peculiar blaze and an unusual warmth. One tree would furnish winter firewood for a family. Its growth was recommended by charitable associations and fought by the coal miners. If cut down during the first month of growth and cut up, it was readily eaten by cattle. It was new, useful and spectacular.

Not till the third year was the danger realized.

Then it was too late.

THE production of club moss trees had passed out of human control. Their growth crowded out all other vegetation. Their falling trunks began to block the highways, arteries of commerce. Only by constant vigilance were the railroads kept open and safe. The land that formerly grew food for a nation now grew nothing but cellulose. The deserts changed into forests, for the tall club moss had roots that had no difficulty in driving down through the dry sands and reaching the water thirty feet below the surface. The smaller rivers were drained of their water, the large rivers became slow flowing swamps. The cities remained isolated oases, saved by their cement pavements.

The mountains might have saved the Pacific and the Atlantic coastal regions had the danger been realized early enough, and had there been no wind. But where water flowed and wind "blowed" the spores carried their menace.

And with the forests came rain. Not gentle, pleasing showers, alternating with days of sunshine and happiness, but a continual dripping precipitation that aided in the rotting of the falling trees and the more rapid growth of the new vegetation.

For decades man had become urbanized. He had almost forgotten the necessity of the agricultural regions. Milk, meat, vegetables, grain came from farms seldom seen and never appreciated, and all that was necessary to prolong life was the cash to buy the products of the farm brought to the cities by train and truck. Now, acre after acre, farm after farm was abandoned to the silent enemy. Where little families had lived, happy, with their feet on the soil and their heads in the clouds, giant trees shot upward, making all other form of life, vegetable or animal, an impossibility.

The cities were starving. Not only that, but they were increasing in popula-

tion at such a rapid rate that there was no work, no room, and no hope. Armies were mobilized to clear land, but faster than the trees could be destroyed they reproduced. People sickened as they worked, despaired as they labored in the constant rain and unending growth and rotting. The United States was rapidly returning to the Pennsylvania period of the Carboniferous age.

CELLULOSE CONSOLIDATED had apparently caused the downfall of a nation. In an effort to secure more business it had been too successful in the growth of cellulose. There was more of the important raw product now in the United States than a dozen nations could commercialize. Besides, people were not buying these products now. All they wanted was food. Clothing, newspapers, a hundred former necessities now seemed useless luxuries. When a man is hungry he can think of nothing else.

Simcox, haggard, remorseful, thinking of little except the starving millions, walked, practically unannounced, into the once busy office of Timothy Tompkins, the President of Cellulose Consolidated. The erstwhile great man was mixing a can of condensed milk with twice its volume of water and drinking it between puffs of a cigar. He was not very happy. At any time the national consciousness might awaken to the fact that he was responsible for the Country's calamity, and then the mob would demand his life; and death at the hands of a hungry mob was not a pleasant thing.

He looked at Simcox with the anger of a God gone mad.

"Get out of here!" he yelled. "I do not see how you have the courage ever to face me!"

Simcox was not afraid.

The peril of the tree terror had been

a great leveler of caste. A rich hungry man was just about equal to a poor hungry man in those days. He sat down opposite Tompkins, without invitation took one of the Havanas out of the humidor and began.

"No use being sore, Mr. Tompkins. You engaged me to do a certain piece of work and told me I would be without a job if I failed to make good. You wanted more cellulose. Was it my fault that I produced more than you could use?"

"You told me that the life of the nation depended on the supply of cellulose. When you talked to us that day you told of a hundred necessary products that could be made from cellulose and of a hundred more household necessities that might come in the future if the supply of raw material placed the cost of production low enough. Do you remember? How you told of the day when houses, roads, even railroads would be built of cellulose? You threatened me and I reacted to the fear of losing my job by giving you the raw material.

"And what did you and your great company do? Practically quit! Because you could not sell, you ceased to invent new uses for this cellulose and even stopped to supply the world with the stuff you knew how to make.

"You quit! At one time you said that given enough cellulose you would give man a three-day, three-hour working week and let him play the rest of the time. I gave you the raw material, and you let America starve to death.

"But I am here to save the nation if you have the courage to fight."

Tompkins almost swallowed his cigar in his rage.

"There was a time," he yelled, "when I would have picked you to pieces and filled the scrap basket. Now, I am through."

"I thought so," said Simcox, "but you were a man once and there may

still be a backbone under that yellow streak. Let me tell you something. In the outer office I have a new found inventor. He is so much of an insane genius that he can think and talk of nothing except cellulose and things to do with it. He has a little machine. A man can cut pieces of club moss with a pen-knife, feed it into that machine and turn a crank, like a coffee grinder used to have, or an ice cream churn. And out of the other end comes food. Real food. I have tasted it. The fool inventor has lived on it and water for three months and is as fat as a turkey at Thanksgiving time. Food! Think of it! You used to say that a steer could take cellulose, digest it and turn it into meat and fat. I remember reading a book about the termites, and how they lived on cellulose. Now, this inventor has turned the trick. Lord Birkenhead prophesied it for 2030, but you said it was too expensive. But the man tells me his little machine can be made for less than three dollars, and five cents' worth of chemicals will make enough food to keep a family a month.

"Use the resources of your great concern. Put these idle million of city dwellers to work. Pay them with machines and a quart of the necessary compound. Send them to the rims of the forests and tell them to break up the young plants and feed them to the machine. Put hope into their hearts. Send word over the nations that from now on no one will go hungry! Radio the specifications of this machine to each of your factories. Tell every manufacturing concern, automobile plant, furniture factory how to make them. Broadcast it! Put food into the stomach and hope into the soul of the desperate men of the nation! Get busy! This inventor says you can have the machine. He is so busy working on new ideas that he cannot be bothered. He thinks he can

make other machines, little household equipment, run by hand, that will make the lives of people comfortable by new uses of cellulose.

"There is room in the cities for everybody. What has made them desperate has been the lack of food, the daily deaths from starvation. With a development of courage and a national spirit of victory, the tide may yet turn. The forests may fill the farms, but even fern trees cannot live on cement pavements. And that cellulose, you wanted so much and did not know what to do with when you got it, can be made to feed us, clothe us, supply us fuel, houses, roads. Once you were called the greatest of all industrial Americans. Here is your chance to show that you deserved that reputation. What is your answer?"

TOMPKINS stood up by his desk. He had been a great leader, and he was still a great one.

"Bring that man in," he cried.

Soon an odd shaped box was on his office table. A long haired man was caressing it lovingly, as a father would an only child, and telling in six syllable words just how it worked.

Tompkins took a dozen lead pencils and broke them to splinters.

"Cellulose is cellulose!" he cried. "This is cedar wood, but the principle remains the same. Which way do you turn the crank?"

Five minutes later little brown tablets began to drop out of a hole near the bottom of the machine. Tompkins put one in his mouth and started to chew.

"It's good!" he cried. "It has a lead-pencil taste, but that can be remedied, and, anyhow, club moss would be different. I do not know so very much about machinery, but if this man made this one, he can tell my experts how to make more." He pushed a dozen buttons and

(Continued on page 119)

GREG BENFORD & DAVID BOOK:



IS ANYBODY OUT THERE?

Where would science-fiction be without aliens? How many stories would fall by the way if there were a rule against mentioning intelligent beings of extra-terrestrial origin?

For an answer to this question, have a look at your own sf collection. By way of comparison, we made a spot check of assorted sf, including novels, anthologies and the current issue of *Amazing*. About one item in three concerned aliens.

Next question: how much scientific evidence is there for the existence of such aliens?

The answer: zero.

Shocking, isn't it? There might not be any of them at all. Or for all anyone knows, the galaxy may be teeming with exotic civilizations. But the simple truth is that there is no proof through direct contact, or communication, or indirect signs of their existence.

In spite of this, the subject of alien intelligence has received considerable

attention in the scientific literature. All of the many articles and books that have been written are of necessity speculative. They use plausibility arguments more than facts. But there are two important ways in which they differ from the speculation in, say, the more strident space opera.

First, scientists don't postulate phenomena which run counter to well-established laws of physics and chemistry. That means no faster than light communications, no gravity shield, no creatures living on a diet of pure energy or radium. Their attitude is basically conservative.

Secondly, the authors try to relate their discussion to predictions that can be tested. This, of course, is a characteristic of science generally. In the field of exobiology, as it's sometimes called, the tests are hard to carry out. They consist of planning space probes that will seek other inhabited planets, or searches for possible artifacts left by aliens visiting Earth, or detecting radio signals and so on.

Since most of these tests haven't been carried out yet (and the ones that have been yielded only negative results), exobiology allows plenty of leeway for a variety of opinions. About the only data we have concerning life in the universe are the hard facts about life on Earth, plus what we infer about the nearby planets.

Of course, it's obviously foolish to expect that life elsewhere will inevitably resemble what we find here. There are bound to be differences. Still, it is unlikely that life elsewhere is totally unlike life on Earth. That would make us exceptional, and thus far it looks as though we are pretty average in most respects. Our sun is like a lot of other stars, Earth resembles several other planets in the solar system, physical laws seem to be the same here as they are elsewhere in the universe. If we can argue that life, especially intelligent life, requires no special condition for its inception, then it would be astonishing if we were alone in the universe.

This principle—the assumption that there is nothing exceptional about Sol, Earth or their general features—is sometimes called the Principle of Mediocrity.

Even if we didn't know enough astronomy to see that our neighborhood looks commonplace by galactic standards, the Principle would be a good assumption.

To see why, consider this problem: Out of a box of stones you're asked to pick one. You don't get to see the rest of them, just yours. Then you're told the rocks are all various sizes, and asked to make a guess about the average size of the rocks. The best guess you could make would be that your stone is average, because there are probably more average rocks than any other kind.

We have only one example of life-supporting stars, so the best we can do is assume that our case is average.

Even so, the Principle of Mediocrity

doesn't take us very far. We still have to guess some numbers. Therefore, at this point we propose to calculate how many alien societies in our galaxy might have a technological base—i.e., how many could build radio gear or space ships. We'll make guesses, but by dealing with specifics it'll be clear just what is known and what isn't.

We'll call the number of technological alien societies N . And N is determined by several factors. We'll take them in order.

Rate of star formation

The galaxy didn't suddenly appear; stars are dying and being born constantly. There are about 10^{11} stars in our galaxy and the galaxy is about 10^{10} years old. (This notation is convenient in dealing with large numbers. " 10^{10} " means 1 followed by ten zeroes, i.e., ten billion; 10^2 is one hundred, 10^3 is one thousand, etc.) That means approximately ten stars were formed each year. We'll call this the rate of formation, R . Right now the rate has slowed down to about one per year, but we'll use the average value for R .

Fraction of stars with solar systems

Contemporary astrophysics says that most stars will form planets. There is strong support for this rather sweeping judgment, which goes beyond the implication of the Principle of Mediocrity.

The best line of argument involves the magnetic fields associated with stars. Like our Sun, in fact like the Earth itself, stars have magnetic fields. In the simplest case, they resemble that of a giant bar magnet aligned along their axis of rotation. The diffuse clouds of gases and dust out of which stars coalesce also exhibit very weak (but measurable) magnetic fields. When this dust collapses under the influence of gravity to form a star, the magnetic field is compressed. If the whole course of a star's

evolution were smooth and continuous, the fields would eventually reach enormous strengths, about 100,000 times as great as those observed.

But they don't. At some stage, great festoons and streams of gas separate off from the evolving star, carrying with them most of the magnetic field energy. These later condense as planets and the magnetic field bleeds out of the solar system. If this theory is right, *every* star has planets.

A second argument roughly parallels this one. If all the planets and asteroids and junk in the solar system were drawn into the sun, the sun would spin about 40 times faster. So if the planetary system had never formed, the sun would probably be spinning rapidly. We observe a few stars with high angular velocities, but most—all other things being equal—spin slowly like the sun. So we conclude they probably have planets, too.

Recently, Professor Robert Dicke of Princeton University has suggested that the interior of the sun is spinning faster than the exterior. If it turns out that the motion of a star's exterior is an unreliable indication of its total spin, we might have to revise our ideas of the prevalence of planets, by this argument.

Things aren't quite this simple, though. If planets start to form in a close binary or multiple system, their motion will be unstable. This means that over a fairly short time they will be driven into very extreme orbits or broken up by the combined action of the gravitational fields of the suns. Binary stars constitute an alternative form of "solar system." They may not need to form planets because multiple stars perform the same functions of bleeding off rotational and magnetic energy. So the widespread occurrence of binaries gives us additional reason to think our understanding of planetary origins is right.

Since a large fraction, perhaps half of all

stars, are members of such multiple systems, this will cut down on the number of available planets. The best guess we can make now, taking everything into account, is that the fraction of stars with planets—denoted by *S*—is around one half. That means the number of solar systems is around 5×10^{10}

Number of livable planets

A planet must not be so near its star that the surface is fried, nor so far away that everything is frozen. The smaller and dimmer a star, the narrower are the limits within which planets enjoy conditions congenial for life. In our solar system, Venus lies on the inner edge of this life zone and Mars is somewhat inside the outer edge. In cases like this, atmosphere is the real key to the problem. The Venerian atmosphere seems to trap heat with a vengeance, so that all the water boils off. This particular atmosphere, then, effectively pushes Venus out of the life zone.

Mars has the opposite problem. Life on Mars looks pretty doubtful now. The Mariner shots imply that the background of almost every sf story set on Mars is substantially inaccurate. An atmosphere with a greenhouse effect would be a great help in damping the day-to-night oscillations in temperature there, to say nothing of filtering out the sun's ultraviolet. None of these aspects is independent of the others, of course—the amount of heat a planet gets from its star helps determine what gases will form and then be held by the gravitational field. It may be, when all such factors are considered, that the effective life zone is really smaller than a simple calculation would show.

Another factor we've skipped over is the internal heating of the atmosphere by the planet itself. Recent work in planetary physics, particularly by Carl Sagan, makes it plausible to imagine Jupiter sustaining life

somewhat like that on Earth. True, most of the planet is probably cold, and poisonous methane abounds. But it looks as though Jupiter's atmosphere is a good heat trap. Its temperature and constituents are similar to those of Earth when life began. One-celled plants and animals may float in the warm soupy atmosphere must as they did in Earth's primordial seas. Nonsolar sources of heat, powered by natural radioactivity in the planet's core, might warm a planet even farther from its star than Jupiter.

Anyway, on the basis of what we can observe locally and what we speculate, it seems reasonable to expect the number of livable planets per solar system to be one. We call this number P.

This would mean that there might be as many as 5×10^{10} livable planets in the galaxy. We see that Isaac Asimov was really being rather conservative when he wrote in the opening pages of *Foundation*: "There were nearly twenty-five million inhabited planets in the Galaxy then..."

Fraction of inhabited planets

It appears that evolution of simple, reproducing organisms proceeds quickly once the conditions for life are satisfied. As Robert Heinlein says in *Farmer in the Sky*, "Life is persistent. Wherever there is mass and energy with conditions that permit the formation of large and stable molecules, there you will find life."

The basic constituents of living matter are already present in pre-stellar nebulae: ammonia, water and methane have been identified spectroscopically in recent work by C.H. Townes and others. Also, there have been a number of experiments to simulate the conditions under which life began. Methane, ammonia, hydrogen and water are mixed and then irradiated with ultraviolet rays, or sparks (to simulate lightning) are passed through the mixture.

This results in a kind of thin porridge of sugars, amino acids and more complex organic molecules, including some remarkably like proteins. If we were to multiply the size and duration of these experiments by a factor of several billion, we would have a fair mock-up of any earth-like planet in its early stages.

On Earth, life evidently arose shortly after the seas formed. Once started, and given an environment which isn't entirely static, evolution toward more complex organisms is probably inevitable. Discovery of even very simple life on Mars or Jupiter would confirm this. So we'll take L, the fraction of livable planets which are inhabited, to be one.

Fraction of inhabited planets which produce intelligent life

This is much harder to estimate. Once a star has formed, it spends the great proportion of its lifetime producing a constant output of heat and light. When it stops this and begins to fluctuate in energy output, any life on surrounding planets will die of heat or cold. If intelligent forms haven't evolved by this time, they won't have another chance. To some extent evolution is forced by background radioactivity, which alters gene structure, but things can't be rushed too much. If the radioactivity is too high, complex biological structures will be destroyed. The only example we have, of course, is Earth, and the only intelligent species we know is *Homo sapiens*.

Man appeared suddenly, about halfway through the constant radiation lifetime of our sun. If man had taken three or four times as long to evolve, Sol would have grown too warm for our race to survive. As things worked out, we made it with a few billion years to spare.

But we may not be unique, after all. True,

fossil records show no trace of any land animal with a brain case as large as Man's, until the advent of the mammals. But intelligence could have developed in the seas. Whales, particularly dolphins, have very large brains in relation to their body size. Dr. John C. Lilly has conducted a series of experiments designed to establish communications with dolphins. Although the results thus far are not very convincing, the possibility cannot yet be discarded.

If dolphins are intelligent, there are two important implications for the search for extraterrestrial life. First, those elusive aliens may be water-dwellers who regard land animals and their habitat with distaste. In that case, if they ever contacted Earth, they would probably have left a record of their visit under water. Secondly, dolphins can't build spaceships because they have no manipulative organs. If the other intelligent species in our galactic neighborhood resemble them in this respect, they have no technology at all, and we will have to go to them.

Even if we only count ourselves, how typical are we? Let's put off answering this question and simply ask, what is the fraction of inhabited planets producing intelligent life of any kind? Rather pessimistically, we'll take this number, I , to be one tenth.

Fraction of technological civilizations

Possession of intelligence doesn't guarantee that one will build machines, viz. the dolphins. It may be that other alien races lacking manipulative organs simply never think of constructing artificial aids to help them survive. Up to a certain point technology surely has survival value—the human race may have reached this point already—but it isn't the only application for intelligence. Increased social organization is one result of intelligence, and that alone may ensure survival for an alien race. This may be the route the dolphins have

followed. They seem to have a close-knit society in which a balance exists between the safety of the individual and the well-being of the group. Human societies are geared to protect the in-group from outside enemies, which they do very successfully. They are less successful in promoting harmony within the group. To put it another way, there is no dolphin equivalent of a fist-fight.

The dolphins may have taken intelligence comparable to ours and used it in a completely different direction. Anthropologists commonly think of tool-making (or to be more honest, weapon-making) as the sole index of intelligence. But on the galactic scale, it may not be so at all. If dolphins prove to be intelligent, we might expect to find many alien societies as untechnological as they. It seems wise to be a bit pessimistic and take the fraction F of intelligent races that build machines to be one tenth.

Lifetime of technical civilizations

This is the toughest estimate of all. Fortunately for us, but unfortunately for this discussion, we cannot rely on our own experience. Once a race has the technology to undertake space travel—let's say once it has atomic power—its days may already be numbered. Many people think this lifetime, which we'll call T , is only a few decades. If nuclear war occurs without killing off everybody, within a few centuries perhaps we could reach the atomic power level again. Then T would be effectively quite long. Or international diplomacy may solve our problems—who knows? We can even speculate that contact with aliens will lengthen T by bleeding off our adventurers and malcontents into other solar systems or societies. So we can take two values for T , if we like: less than 100 years, if we're pessimistic, and much longer—say, a billion years—if we believe that most alien societies

both *can* and *will choose* to persist for long times. Then, as an average, let's say T is 107 years across the galaxy.

Our estimates are now finished. The number of alien societies in our galaxy which could build spaceships, N, is just the product of all these guesses:

$$N = \text{RSPLIFT} \\ = \text{one half million}$$

If these civilizations are smoothly distributed through the galaxy, the most probable distance to the nearest such society is around a hundred light years.

We must emphasize that N is very sensitive to our estimate of T. If T averages only 100 years, then we are probably the only technical community in this galaxy. We may be the best engineers in a hundred billion stars—for a little while.

If N equals a half million technical civilizations, we can draw a few more tentative conclusions.

We said earlier that the number of livable planets is probably about 5×10^{10} . This is approximately ten thousand times N. So there will be around ten thousand livable planets on the average for each technological community, available for exploration or colonization. If this is close to being right, space-going aliens will have a lot of territory to themselves before they

bump into another race. It won't be an easy matter to nip over to one's neighbors. A galactic empire of several races would be severely handicapped by communication lags. Problems would arise and demand solutions before any useful information could be learned from the nearest aliens, who might be 60 or so light years away. The nearest technological alien society would be like China three centuries ago—exotic, rewarding, but very expensive to reach.

Even so, with strange beings and environments possibly that near, it would be tempting to go out and find them. In a century or two we may be able to do just that. But there must be communities older than ours. Why haven't they visited us yet?

Maybe they have. We'll deal with that possibility next issue.

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—Greg Benford & David Book

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 113)

THE TREE TERROR

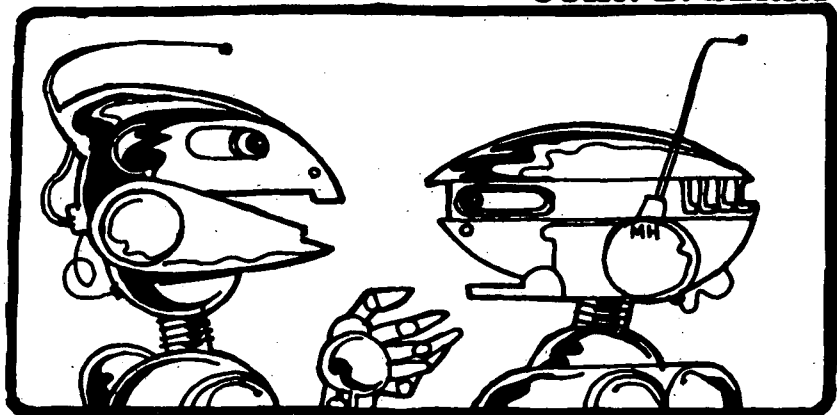
started to give orders to the amazed, excited men who had been dozing in a dozen empty offices.

"We are saved!" he told them. "It's going to be a long fight and a hard one, but, once the nation is fed, the rest will be easy. All we need is courage and a backbone. Listen to this inventor. Let him talk and then get busy. Radio the specifications of this machine to all of our factories. Tell them to spread the news. In three days the

starving, eating cellulose, will be growing strong—made from club moss—and then, when the fear of starvation is gone, we will start to use those forests. A hundred new ways of using cellulose will be found, and Cellulose Consolidated will once again be the greatest commercial organization in the world!"

"Do I get that raise in salary?" asked Simcox.

THE END



*** THE CLUBHOUSE**

You know something? There are a *lot* of fanzines being published today. Too many, in fact. Three or four years ago, we were all complaining about the "Apa Boom"—the incredible profusion of amateur press associations, which isolated new fans from old, when the new ones were too impatient to wait out the waiting lists of FAPA and SAPS and so forth and formed apas of their own, with no one in them but themselves. Since Dick Geis revived *PSYCHOTIC* (now *SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW*) and sparked a renewed interest in publishing genzines (general-circulation fanzines, as opposed to apazines—remember?), the older fans have become shockingly aware of how fandom has grown: new genzines seem to be sprouting up all over the place, and the neofans who were once hidden away in their own apas have burst on the publishing scene en masse, much the way they swarmed into the once-small worldcons a few years earlier.

This is a good thing—partly. It's certainly better to have fans publishing genzines that

are available to anyone, without the necessity of waiting lists and such. The neofans have much easier access to top-quality material, now, so that they have something to measure themselves against. But I wonder how many of these brand-new faneditors realize just how numerous they are?

Fandom today is *big*. It's so big that it's very hard to keep track of all the different corners and crannies. Unfortunately, many new fans don't try. And the older fans, deluged under an endless wave of fanzines, retreat into the known and the familiar.

Newcomers, you're scaring us off!

I wonder how many new, young faneditors give much thought to the impression their zines make. What do you do if you are a fan and you get a 60-page first issue in the mail from someone you've never heard of, full of material from a dozen other people who are total strangers? Do you read it? Maybe. But what if you got two other, similar fanzines the same day, and the day before you got three, and the next day you get four more

still? Now I may be something of a special case, because I write this column; beginning faneds are liable to send me creations that most actifans never lay eyes on, or at least not until several issues later when they have improved a great deal. But really, how can anyone read them all?

I try; I really do try. But I must admit I am daunted by the tremendous pile of fanzines—mostly new and unread, or worse yet, several issues old and still unread, and with response only from other neofans:

So, for all you young faneds who are planning to put together a Great, Big, Gala Fanzine to make your debut in fandom—think again. Don't do it. Publish, instead, something small, something that will be noticed while all the multi-page giants go unread. Write the material yourself; give fandom a chance to get to know you. That's what fandom is all about: a lot of individuals expressing themselves in an interesting and creative way. If you are good, or even if you're not good but you show promise, we'll welcome you, and you'll find that fandom is a pretty nice family after all.

Even if it is big.

CROSSROADS #6, Sept., 1969; 25¢ or 12/\$3; monthly, from Al Snider, Box 2319, Brown Station, Providence, R.I. 02912 (his college address for this year; the address given in the last column was his home address); 40 pp., mimeographed.

In my last column (in the November issue), I said briefly that CROSSROADS "has the potential to go somewhere." Well, now it's going. It's heading straight for the spot left vacant by Dick Geis when he took SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW out of the focal point business and off in his own directions. CROSSROADS has something that Geis's fanzine hasn't had for a long time—it's monthly—and that helps a lot:

Already there are people in the lettercolumn saying they wrote to CROSSROADS instead of to SFR.

Snider is following very closely the Dick Geis Formula for Making Your Fanzine a Focal Point of Fandom—a little too closely, I think. All the characteristics of SFR are here: the dominance of the lettercolumn, the intense desire for controversy rather than discussion, the verbal pyrotechnics used in close infighting among fan and pro alike. This fanzine is indeed becoming the crossroads of fandom.

Unfortunately, it lacks something. Snider is not the writer that Geis is; Snider has an irritating lack of precision with both his words and his thoughts. He doesn't have the superb visual presentation that Geis has achieved. He has a severe lack of meaty articles, and a rather under-edited lettercolumn. These are all areas in which he falls down when compared with SFR; he also shares a fault with Geis: both fanzines give a potential contributor the impression that he'd better not submit anything just because it's good—it has to be controversial, too. Or maybe even instead.

Despite all my criticisms, CROSSROADS is a pretty good fanzine. It may not be the best fandom has to offer, but by virtue of its frequency, if nothing else, it is becoming a place where a lot of action takes place. Certainly it's worth getting.

CROSSROADS is young yet; my criticisms may well be invalid soon after this column sees print. The current issue, for instance, shows what I hope will be the beginning of an effort to put more meat and good writing into the issues: a thoughtful, well-written article by the pseudonymous "Dean Head" on the current question of drugs in fandom. (This is also the major topic of discussion in the lettercolumn, although the hotheads there seem to lack some of the rationality evident in "Dean's"

article.)

That one article is unfortunately the full extent of the interesting material outside of the editorial and the lettercolumn. There is one other article, but it's just a short piece by John J. Pierce, the self-appointed, one-man Crusade to Clean Up Science Fiction; it starts out intelligently enough, but by the end it degenerates into a typical J.J. Pierce morass of muddy thinking.

The rest of the issue is letters, and that seems to be where the focus lies. Snider will need more than that, though.
Recommended.

QUIP #12, Aug., 1969; 50¢, and no subscriptions; bimonthly, from Arnie Katz, Apt. 3-J, 55 Pineapple St., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201; 48 pp., mimeographed.

I hope I wasn't being prophetic last column, when I said that Arnie could fold QUIP right now and it would still be remembered as a top fanzine. After publishing the last issue, he promptly dropped fan publishing for several months. The actual time-lag between issues may not be that much by fannish standards, but he has said that to him, subjectively, it was like a couple of years away from fandom. Unfortunately, it shows in this issue. His writing has not deteriorated, as shown by his short, but well-written editorial, but Arnie's editorial hand has not yet recovered all of its sureness. The material in this issue is actually very good, certainly no worse than any other issue, but the atmosphere of the whole is rather fragmented.

There doesn't seem to be as much material as usual, because one item takes up a great deal of the space: Lon Atkins' fannish story, "The Circle Game." The story is well-done and highly entertaining, involving a young group of fans who created a hoax-fan and then had to find someone to play the part of the hoax when a Big Name

Fan came through town, but it's not so brilliant that it dominates the issue by its quality. And unfortunately it does dominate the issue by its length. This is a minor quibble, though; the story is excellent.

Of the regular columnists, Greg Benford and Harry Warner both put in a performance. Greg contributes his usual insightful set of fanzine reviews, this time reviewing LOCUS and SFR in depth. His outlook on fandom is always just a little bit different than anyone else's, and I look forward to Greg's reviews each time, even when we disagree on things such as whether SFR is a focal point or not. Harry's column is rather different than usual: this time, rather than writing about an old-time fanzine, he has taken a long backward glance at what fandom has thought of the moon in the past. The most memorable item is the Tower to the Moon of Beercans that the fans in Berkeley proposed to build in the Fifties, although Harry also quotes various fans in their reactions to the more prosaic events of our government space program through the years. In line with the Tower story, Arnie has reprinted a short bit from one of the editorials that Terry Carr wrote on the matter when he and the rest of then-Berkeley fandom were developing it. Hilarious.

This QUIP also contains another installment of Steve Stiles' TAFF-account, "Harrison Country"; it is unfortunately a rather minor episode, of which the best parts are the accompanying cartoons. The last major piece in this issue is the "Derogation" produced by Boyd Raeburn and myself. Boyd's Derogations were famous in the Fifties, and last year I tried my hand at reviving the idea; Boyd liked it, and this second one is a collaboration. The basic idea is a playlet in which various fannish characters engage in verbal fencing and the utter devastation of whatever

fugghead is the current target. This time we took on Dick Geis and some of the newer British fans. The trouble with this Derogation is that for someone not familiar with the form, it begins rather abruptly, but you get used to it.

The lettercolumn of this issue is a bit sparse, I think, but well-edited as usual. QUIP seems to be back on some sort of regular schedule, and it certainly is well worth getting. *Highly recommended.*

BEABOHEMA #5, Aug., 1969; 60¢ or 2/\$1, 3/\$1.50, etc. (this issue only: 75¢); irregular, from Frank Lunney, 212 Juniper St., Quakertown, Pa. 18951; 110 pp., mimeographed.

"90% of BEABOHEMA is crud."

This variation of Sturgeon's Law would have been valid before the current issue. In fact, it still is, if you take into account all five issues at once. But BAB 5 represents a considerable improvement, one which I hope holds promise of better things to come.

Frank Lunney is an example of the fan who has only come into fandom within the last two years, who starts out with a thick first issue mostly written by other neofans, and who gathers about him fans who entered fandom maybe six months later and so consider him a Big Name Fan. However, Lunney has taken this even farther. His first issue showed some kind of elusive quality to it that attracted a favorable response. Lunney, perhaps flattered by all the attention he was getting, published everything he was sent, and since then every issue has been terribly big and thick, a magnificent celebration of mediocrity.

How did he get away with this? Simple. BEABOHEMA created its own fandom, centered upon itself, with Lunney and his principle contributors as its gods and BNFs.

None of this has changed with the new issue. What has changed is that where once

you saw the worship of controversy that's so prevalent in SFR and CROSSROADS, now it appears that there is more emphasis on interesting, entertaining discussion. It's a good question whether this is the result of a change of editorial policy or a mere accident of several readers getting sick of the arguing and bickering at the same time. In either case, I hope Lunney will edit future issues with an eye to less manufactured controversy and better writing.

One of the problems of BEABOHEMA crops up immediately in the editorial: Frank Lunney can't write. He admitted this freely in BAB 4, but it didn't seem to bother him; on the contrary, he appeared quite pleased by it. He said that most editors are poor writers and felt that this was the way it ought to be. He is wrong. A quick skim through the best fanzines, past or present, will show that very rarely indeed has someone who is only a mediocre writer succeeded in publishing a top-quality fanzine. Never has a writer as weak as Lunney succeeded.

The most important contents of BAB are personal columns, of which there are several, most of them virtually interchangeable with letters in the lettercolumn. To begin with there is Piers Anthony's 11-page column, in which he talks about an index of reviews of sf books that he worked on and touches on various other topics. Anthony is a good writer, and his column is usually interesting. Unfortunately, he exhibits a pronounced arrogance in his approach to fandom and a strong egotism in the way he writes about everything in terms of its relation to him. These are qualities that I suspect I would come to accept and not apply such inflammatory names as "arrogance" and "egotism" to if I were a friend of Piers'; however, coming at his work from a neutral standpoint, I must say I'm irritated by these

attitudes.

Of the other columnists, Dean Koontz is informative, giving news of Hollywood's future intentions toward science fiction; Leo P. Kelley speculates on artists, and sf writers in particular, being basically on the lookout for an escape from reality and makes a good point; Gary N. Hubbard gives us a few rather interesting random thoughts, in a rambling, trippy style. All of these are unusual, in that each of these columns was at best mediocre in the previous issue. Seth Dogramajian's column on fan art was interesting in both issues, although in the earlier column he defended Robert E. Gilbert, a fan artist whom I consider one of the least-talented regularly-appearing artists in fandom. Bill Marsh, in his "In the Swamp," unfortunately reverses the general trend by turning in a worse column than his last. In BAB 4 he wrote an amusing piece that both provoked laughs and effectively lampooned the tendency to search for Controversy at all costs that dominated the fanzine; this issue he took himself too seriously and wrote overenthusiastically on a childish "organization" that he proposed, called the Ultimate Foundation. (This sort of thing seems endemic to BEABOHEMA, however; the fanzine's title comes from something that Lunney thought up in the first issue, "Bohema Fandom." Everybody that Lunney considered a Good Guy was made an honorary Bohema. A Bohema has nothing to do with a behemoth, or a Bohemian—it's just Frank Lunney's nonsense word.)

Despite all these columns, in 110 pages Lunney finds room for other things. Ron Smith writes well on the reactions of himself and his (and my) generation to THE GRADUATE and GOODBYE, COLUMBUS. Dale Goble does a remarkably sane job of criticizing John J.

Pierce and his "Second Foundation." Joe Hensley contributes a short, amusing bit trying to convince everyone that he is not somebody's pseudonym. Besides these, there is a section of reviews by various people, and a piece of fiction—neither of which did I have the time or inclination to read. And, finally, there is the lettercolumn, all 34 pages of it. The lettercolumn, like the rest of the zine, could stand a lot more editing, but it contains a much smaller number of silly or downright fatuous letters than the previous issue.

In appearance, BEABOHEMA features a great deal of—there's that word again—mediocre art, but it also has some fine stuff by Mike Gilbert, Bill Rotsler, Doug Lovenstein, and Richard Flinchbaugh. Unfortunately, I'm not sure if editor Lunney can tell the difference. Good layout is mostly non-existent, with a couple of rare exceptions.

On the whole, it was an effort to wade through all those pages, but not entirely a wasted one. For its first four issues, BEABOHEMA was so enthusiastically mediocre that it was mindrotting; now it is improving. It seems unlikely ever to become a really good fanzine; but if it continues in this direction I expect the next issue will be worth reading. *Moderately interesting.*

Other fanzines:

There are a great many fanzines I would have liked to review this time, but time limitations forced them out. In addition, several fanzines have not been listed in this column because a) I didn't make the last deadline, and b) in the column before that two pages of listings had to be cut for lack of space. Hopefully, next issue more fanzines will be given in-depth treatment.

The fanzines below that are starred like this (*) are particularly recommended.

DOUBLEBILL #21, Fall, 1969; this issue \$1, usually 75¢, 4/\$2; three or four times a year, from Bill Mallardi and Bill Bowers, P.O. Box 368, Akron, Ohio 44309; 100 pp., multilithed.

***SPECULATION** #23, Jul., 1969; 35¢ or 3/\$1; irregular, from Peter R. Weston, 31 Pinewall Ave., Masshouse Lane, Birmingham 30, ENGLAND; 48 pp., mimeographed. A literate, refreshing fanzine concerned with science fiction.

PHANTASMICOM #1, Summer, 1969; 2/\$1; quarterly, from Donald G. Keller, 1702 Meadow Court, Baltimore, Md. 21207, with co-editor Jeffrey D. Smith; 68 pp., spirit duplicated. Neatly done, but with lots of *sigh* amateur science fiction.

THE ESSENCE #1, Summer, 1969; 50¢ or 2/\$1; quarterly, from Jay Zaremba, 21000 Covello St., Canoga Park, Calif. 91303; 28 pp., offset.

RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY vol. 4, #1; Aug., 1969; 60¢ or 4/\$2; irregular, from Leland Sapiro, Box 40 University Station, Regina, Sask., CANADA; 76 pp., offset. Very Serious and Constructive and concerned with sf.

ARGENTINE SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW #7, Apr., 1969; 6/\$2; no schedule listed, from Hector R. Pessina, Casilla de Correo 3869, Correo Central, Buenos Aires, ARGENTINA; 32 pp., offset. In English.

RETURN TO WONDER #5, Jul.-Aug., 1969; no price or schedule listed; from Stephen Riley, 18 Norman Dr., Farmingham, Mass. 07101; 56 pp., mimeographed (?).

MYTHLORE #3, Jul., 1969; 65¢ or 4/\$2.50; quarterly, from Glen GoodKnight, 504 Elm St., Alhambra, Calif. 91801; 50 pp., mimeographed. Published by the Mythopoeic Society.

FOMA #2, Summer, 1969; 30¢; no schedule listed, from Daniel Carr and Mike

O'Brien, Ann Arbor Fandom, 1011 Student Act. Bldg., Ann Arbor, Mich. 48104; 52 pp., mimeographed.

KALKI #10, Spring, 1969; 4/\$5; irregular, from Paul Spencer, 665 Lotus Ave., Oradell, N.J. 07649; 42 pp., offset. Published by the James Branch Caball Society; James Blish and W. Leigh Godshalk, editors.

STARDOCK #2, Apr., 1969; 40¢ or 4/\$1.50; irregular, from Stan Nicholls, 5 St. John's Wood Terrace, St. John's Wood, London NW 8, ENGLAND; 40 pp., offset.

GOTHIQUE #8, Oct., 1968; 40¢ or 4/\$1.50; irregular, from Stan Nicholls, address above; 24 pp., offset. This issue out of print; next issues of both this and STARDOCK should be out now.

THE MENTOR #16, Aug., 1969; no price or schedule listed; from Ron L. Clarke, 78 Redgrave Rd., Normanhurst N.S.W. 2076, AUSTRALIA; 76 pp., mimeographed. It appears that with the next issue the title will change to EOS, and it will be available only for comment or contribution.

***TRUMPET** #10, Sept., 1969; 75¢ or 5/\$3.50; three or four times a year, from Tom Reamy, P.O. Box 523, Richardson, Texas; 52 pp., offset. Beautiful visual presentation.

MUNICH ROUND-UP #106, May, 1969; 35¢ or 6/\$1.50, 12/\$2.50; irregular, from Waldemar Kummig, 8 Munchen 2, Herzogspitalstr. 5, Postscheckkonto München 14 78 14, GERMANY; 42 pp., spirit duplicated. A prolific (#100 was 144 pp.) German fanzine, in German.

MATHOM SECONDS #2, June, 1969; 25¢; no schedule listed, from Lisa Tuttle, 6 Pine Forest Circle, Houston, Texas 77027; 44 pp., mimeographed. This is either a first issue or a second issue—or maybe both. I'm not sure.

ALEPH NULL #2, May, 1969; 50¢ and

a 6¢ stamp; irregular, from Mark Gawron and Mark Barclay, 4232 N. Kedvale, Chicago, Ill. 60641; 44 pp., mimeographed.

FORUM INTERNATIONAL #1, July, 1969; 5/\$2; quarterly, from Per Insulander, Midsommarvagen 33, S-126 35 Hagersten, SWEDEN; 40 pp., mimeographed. Published by the Scandinavian SF Society, in English.

CORR #2, Summer, 1969; 30¢ or 4/\$1; quarterly, from Perri Corrick, 1317 Spring St. #110, Madison, Wis. 53715; 50 pp., mimeographed.

*CRY #182, June, 1969; 40¢, no subs of more than \$2; six-weekly, from Vera Heminger, 30214 108th Ave. SE, Auburn, Wash. 98002, with co-editors Elinor Busby and Wally Weber; 36 pp., multilithed. This isn't the latest issue, but it's the last one I have. A old fanzine that was revived; it started out weak, but it's recovering.

MINICON 2, Third Progress Report, Spring, 1969; free upon request; from Jim Young, 1948 Ulysses St. NE, Minneapolis, Minn. 55418; 10 pp., mimeographed. A report of the 2nd Annual Minnesota SF Convention, and a boost for the Minneapolis in '73 worldcon bid.

RAGNAROK #1-2, no dates; 25¢; quarterly, from Gregory E. Moore, Box 298, Mayview, Bridgeville, Pa. 15017; 44 & 74 pp., respectively, spirit duplicated. The official organ of the Western Pennsylvania SF Association.

*DAVID MALONE'S SCIENCE FICTION-FANZINE #2, Spring, 1969; 35¢ or 3/\$1; irregular, from David T. Malone, Bacon Road, Roxbury, Conn. 06783; 84 pp., spirit duplicated and mimeographed. Attractive and promising new fanzine.

*ENNUI #2, Sept., 1969; 25¢; bimonthly (ha!), from Creath Thorne, 706 Hudson Hall, Columbia, Mo. 65201; 18 pp., mimeographed. Excellent, well-written, well-thought-out personalzine.

*SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW #31-2, June & Aug., 1969; 50¢; six-weekly, from Richard E. Geis, P.O. Box 3116, Santa Monica, Calif. 90403; 64. & 52 pp., respectively, mimeographed. Geis has gone back to mimeo and 8 1/2 x 11 size. Both issues typically good; but not outstanding. SFR won the Hugo this year, as best fanzine of 1968.

MENTAT #11, May, 1969; \$3 per year; irregular, from Ulf Westblom, Urban Hjarnes Vag 20, S-161 52 Bromma, SWEDEN; 70 pp., mimeographed. Published by the Swedish SF Society; partly in Swedish, partly English.

AKOS #2, Aug., 1969; no price or schedule listed; from Janet Megson, 321 W. 105th St., Apt. 50, New York, N.Y. 10025; 30 pp., mimeographed (?). A remarkably good new fanzine, published by the Fantasy and SF Society of Columbia University.

AVESTA #1, Jul., 1969; 25¢ this issue, future issues 35¢ or 3/\$1; quarterly, from Don Blyly, 825 W. Russell, Peoria, Ill. 61606; 28 pp., mimeographed.

NAPALM #5, Aug., 1969; 15¢; irregular, from Wally Conger, Route 1 Box 450-A, Arroyo Grande, Calif. 93420; 10 pp., mimeographed. A small zine of political, etc., opinions.

*LOCUS #37, Sept. 10, 1969; 6/\$1, 12/\$2, 18/\$3; biweekly, from Charlie & Marsha Brown, 2078 Anthony Ave., Bronx, N.Y. 10457; 22 pp. (including inserts), mimeographed. The best, most frequent fannish newszine.

ICENI #6, Sept., 1969; 40¢, 3/\$1; quarterly, from Bob Roehm, 316 E. Maple St., Jeffersonville, Ind. 47130; 62 pp., mimeographed.

NIMROD #13, Jul., 1969; 50¢ or 5/\$2; irregular, from Dwain Kaiser, 390 N. Euclid, Upland, Calif. 91786, with co-editor Al Snider; 44 pp., mimeographed. Fannish, but heavily Los Angeles-oriented.

—John D. Berry

THE



FUTURE in BOOKS

Ursula K. Le Guin: *A WIZARD OF EARTHSEA*. Parnassus Press, Berkeley, California, 1968. 205 pp., hardbound, \$3.95.

On the dustjacket of this book appears the chaste legend, "11 up." This signifies that someone at the company which published the book made the arbitrary decision that those who are at least eleven, or older, can read *A Wizard of Earthsea*. This legend can be found in one of various disguises on any book which is published as a "juvenile." On the two of mine which have thus far been published, one says "0012-0015," or "for ages 12 to 15," while the other, even more cryptic, says "0120†" which means "age twelve and up."

I've asked many librarians and publishers the reason for this arbitrary and sometimes capricious statement of age limits, and the librarians blame the publishers, while the publishers blame the librarians, each stating that the other requires it or insists upon it.

There are two ways to write "juvenile" novels. One is to accept those age limitations. The other is to ignore them.

Every good "juvenile" in our field (and I shall, on the basis of their reviews, immodestly include my own) has been the result of a flat unwillingness on the part of its author to write down to a specific age-group. Certain taboos persist and define the "juvenile" novel, and the major one is that boy-girl relationships may (now) hint at sex, but must never actually move into the "adult" realm. (Well, Henry Gregor Felsen ignored that taboo too, but so far no one else has been able to.) In all respects other than that, however, a good "juvenile" must be written to the same high standards that prevail in adult fiction. This is born of the fact that the "juvenile" novel is aimed at an artificial market: the teenager who already reads "adult" novels—and "adult" magazines like this one. The "juvenile" is a librarian's category, actually, and the bulk of its sales are to libraries, and not to private individuals.

I go into this in such detail because some very fine writing is going into "juvenile" works these days, and it is being overlooked

by entirely too many would-be adults who feel that books with the "juvenile" label must be below them. Heinlein was the first to make this point obvious to us—and he did it quite simply and directly: by selling his supposedly "juvenile" novels to the "adult" science fiction magazines for advance serialization. James Blish is another who has done the same thing. But it took a man with Heinlein's prior name and reputation to break down this barrier, and I suspect he got away with it because those novels were *Heinlein* novels, than for any other reason. Later, of course, Ace Books quietly put Andre Norton's "juveniles" into print alongside her "adult" sf—and few could tell the difference. The point was made: the label is meaningless. And yet it sticks. And yet the myth of it persists.

You might say that I am a little bitter on the subject; I have published two such novels myself and I am proud to have anyone, of any age, read them. And I'm annoyed when they are consistently overlooked in the honors sweepstakes by the snobs. But the actual reason I am so taxed by the subject is that I fell victim to it myself. For something like a year, I put off obtaining a copy or reading *A Wizard of Earthsea* because I'd heard it was "only a children's book."

I've followed Ursula Le Guin's career in AMAZING and FANTASTIC since the days when Cele Goldsmith was publishing her first stories. I read each of her four Ace novels with increasing excitement, wonder and enthusiasm. But, having heard no less than a year ago that she was publishing "a children's fantasy," I dismissed the book from my thoughts. For some reason I, an Oz fan from before I could myself read, and a collector of old boys' books, I made the unwarranted assumption that Miss Le Guin's "children's fantasy" was probably of no consequence.

Thus does prejudice betray us all.

It wasn't easy to track down *A Wizard of Earthsea*. I saw a copy at a fangroup meeting, thumbed through it, and was vaguely impressed by its apparent solidity. I was told that the publisher, Parnassus Press, was impossible to locate and that the book could be found in no bookstores. I thereby inquired of the owner as to how he had found his copy. He referred me to Dick Witter, the genial proprietor of the F&SF Book Co. on Staten Island, with whom I've done business for many years, and Witter in turn told me he'd obtained the publisher's address from an *Australian* correspondent. He'd ordered some copies and was doing a brisk business with them. I bought my copy from Witter. The whole story of that purchase is itself, you see, something of an epic quest.

I was immediately impressed, as I said, by the appearance of the book. It is a handsome example of the modern bookmaker's art. Printed by lithography on good paper, it is illustrated with woodcut-like designs by Ruth Robbins, and an excellently drafted map, smaller sections of which are blown up to full-page size at appropriate spots in the book. The general quality of the book's graphics is excellent, and quite enough to shame more established publishers. I only wonder that it was all done for a list price of \$3.95.

The book itself?

Have you read *The Left Hand of Darkness*? Have you noticed the careful detail Miss Le Guin lavishes upon her alien cultures, the place-names, occupations, religions, folk-lore and songs of her wholly-invented lands and peoples? Have you become aware of the almost mythic quality of her quiet but certain story-telling?

If you can answer a *yes* to any of those questions, I think you will be impressed and delighted with *A Wizard of Earthsea*.

Although roughly cast into the “juvenile” mold—it deals with the growth to manhood of a boy, beginning when he is quite young, dealing primarily with his adolescent years and ending when he is still only 19—the book is fully as finely crafted as any of her earlier novels. The care and attention when went into the creation of the Archipelago of Earthsea, with its myriad islands and peoples and customs—a look at the map alone is enough to overwhelm one; one tiny section is known as “The Ninety Isles”—must have been greater even than that expended upon the planet Winter, in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Map freaks and fantasy-land nuts will find more in Earthsea to claim their attention than in all of Tolkien’s Middle Earth.

More important, the story Miss Le Guin tells is as vivid and moving as that of *Lord of the Rings*—and at a fraction of that work’s length. It is a story of wizardry, of spells and magic, of balances between light and darkness. But it is, more important, a story of *learning*, of the perilous road to maturity through the maze of traps made possible by magical lore.

It is not one of your lighthearted romps, either. The boy, Duny, has the mage-power in him, and it comes out at an early age. From that time on, he is marked by it, singled out by it, exalted by it, humbled by it, and taught by it. From the outset we are aware that he is bound for greatness as “Sparrowhawk, who in his day became both dragonlord and Archmage. His life is told of in the *Deed of Ged* and in many songs, but this is a tale of the time before his fame, before the songs were made.”

It’s a haunting tale, the story of a proud, lonely boy striving to learn and to understand all that there is to know. Driven by his pride, stung by jealousy, he uses his powers unwisely and too soon, opening a gateway into the land of the dead, and

summoning up his own Death, which, abroad in the land of the living, seeks to consume him. Ultimately he must meet Death and face it.

That’s just not one of your “children’s fantasies.” It is a tale of raw and basic power, and Miss Le Guin does not falter in her telling of it. Her prose is clean and crisp, yet poetic in image. She manages to avoid the studied anachronisms which clutter the works of lesser writers working in this vein, yet evokes the sense of an earlier, simpler time and place. She does it with place-names and folk-lore, with exactly proper “bits of business”, with hints of other legends and tales to be told. She does it overwhelmingly well.

A Wizard of Earthsea is a major work of fantasy, and about as much “for children” as is Tolkien, or, for that matter, Lewis Carroll. In fact, I wouldn’t suggest it for younger children; its theme is too mature.

But I would recommend it most strongly to you, the readers of this magazine. And here is the final irony: In September of 1970, it will be republished as an Ace Science Fiction Special. Right in the same series with *The Left Hand of Darkness*. And maybe that will shatter the “juvenile” myth once and for all.

Ted White—

Ted White: NO ‘TIME LIKE TOMORROW. Crown Publishers, N.Y., 1969. 152 pp., hardbound, \$3.95.

Most anti-utopia stories are of the classic pattern: the hero is transported somehow into the future, given a tour around, and in some fashion makes it back to the life he once knew, a wiser man for the experience. This novel is of that pattern, but it’s unusual because the primary focus of the book is not the future, but the two characters who must fight their way through it.

Characterization is Ted White's strong suit. His hero, Frank, is a recognizable boy in his own right, not just a stereotype mid-century teenager. He is a person, not a name who scratches his left elbow every two pages to show you he's not as much a cardboard cutout as you thought. Frank is snatched forward 500 years into the future, to find a society dominated by a few corporations. It's a seamy place for most people—few jobs, scarce resources, an hereditary elite with life-or-death power over their employees. By chance Frank and Dorian, a naive heiress of the mammoth Syncom corporation, are kidnapped together. A series of chance encounters and good luck—sometimes too good, for my taste—gets them safely through a world that resembles, in moral character, Dickens' London.

All this is interesting but standard until page 62, when suddenly the author steps aside, takes off the gloves, and hits the reader with the *reality* of death, of individual isolation, of the terrible aloneness we have all known and will know again. This is strong stuff for a juvenile novel, and White doesn't stop there. Sequences like this recur; the reader is drawn steadily into this gritty, completely visualized future world.

This is an effective novel because White has learned to involve the reader strongly with his characters and then, using them, to tell his audience things about being a mortal, vulnerable man that have remarkable punch. A teenager reading this book would be considerably impressed, I think.

Honesty is always impressive in sf, considering how much genteel lying is done every day. There are a lot of bits in this book, skewering pollution, exploitative ads, consumerism, archaic ideas of freedom that lead to overpopulation, etc.—and most

aren't baldly stated, but implied. This makes them all the more effective. Example: White's corporation-dominated future seems to lack an intellectual middle class—traditionally the source of revolutionaries—other than the scientific cadres who are bought and sold by the corporations. Why? The author doesn't say so, but there are hints that this class—which includes most of the people who are reading this review—was eventually corrupted and destroyed by the corporate/government structure.

Good characterization in sf is usually accompanied by weak science and flimsy social extrapolation. But in White's juveniles there is a respect for how things really work. The breed of teenager who loves the Heinlein-style juvenile is still around, drug generation or no. This reader *likes* to find out how an ordinary TV works and how one repairs it, if it's a valid part of the story. This is one of the jobs juvenile fiction does—telling about growing up and what it's like to be an adult, do productive work and bear responsibilities.

Even if you're not this breed of cat, White's juveniles—including the earlier *SECRET OF THE MAURADER SATELLITE*—are worth reading. Only by convention are they juveniles; the approach is quite adult.

—Greg Benford

Michael Crichton: *THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1969. 295 pp., hardbound, \$5.95.

The Andromeda Strain can be considered *qua* novel, but it might be more instructive to consider it *qua* publishing phenomenon. Now, in mid-August, it has been on the *Times* best-seller list for 20-plus weeks; it is a Book of the Month selection; Universal has paid \$250,000 for the film rights; and its

author, 26-year-old Michael Crichton, has been the subject of numerous feature articles and considerable mid-cult adulation.

All this for a well-made, though unoriginal and largely unexciting, s-f novel. Why?

Begin with Crichton. The chap's fine Sunday supplement material, never doubt it. He almost qualifies as a prodigy, of productivity if not talent, having published five novels before *The Andromeda Strain*, and one since while acquiring a *summa cum laude* from Harvard and a medical degree. He's tall—six-foot-nine—and gangly good-looking, a la early Jimmy Stewart. And modest. "My editor and I agreed it was a nice little book," he told an Associated Press reporter, "but it wasn't going to do very much. As far as I'm concerned, it's a fluke." Furthermore, Crichton isn't one of your shaggy bohemians. He has publicly extolled the merits of monogamy, his hair is respectably cropped, he dresses suburbia-informal. He's exactly the kind of writer your mother is happy about the success of, and wishes you were more like.

Then, there's the timing. Norman Mailer once admitted that *The Naked and the Dead* made money because when it was released, the nation was ready for a big novel about World War Two. Similarly, the nation is now ready for a big novel about space. Apollo 11 did more for *The Andromeda Strain* than any publicist Knopf could dream of hiring.

Finally, contemplate the nature of "pure" science fiction vis-a-vis the Protestant Ethic. American s-f found its first large audience in subscribers to Gernsback's radio magazines—publications intended primarily as instruction. A worthy, stern Protestant Ethician has to dismiss reading for pleasure as frivolity: but if he can convince himself a story is *teaching* him

about science, he can enjoy heroine-rescuing and villain-vanquishment with a clear conscience. I suspect that many men bought *The Andromeda Strain* to be instructed—a fella's got to keep up, after all.

They should be satisfied. As a teaching aid, *The Andromeda Strain* is excellent: score one for the Ethic. But as fiction, the book is routine. A rocket returns to Earth infected with alien microorganisms. It lands near a tiny, isolated Arizona town, and the bugs promptly do in everyone except an aging wino and a squalling infant. Four scientists, previously trained for such an emergency, rush to learn the nature of the disease and develop a cure before it spreads. At—yes—the last possible minute, they do.

Although Crichton's prose is seldom better than adequate, and his characterization razor-thin, he does have craftsman-like virtues. He gets more service from the creaking race-against-annihilation suspense gimmick than I thought possible. He can make complex biological concepts understandable, even to readers with no scientific education. He has a nice sense of detail. His attacks on incompetent technocrats are both sharp and realistic. And, like a skilled detective-story writer, he never cheats: all pertinent data is given, and an astute biologist might solve the problem before Crichton's quartet of heroes.

But poetry, wit, wonder, imaginative speculation, the majesty and beauty of the unknown—these are lacking. For readers who consider them the substance of science fiction, rather than mere decorative conceits, *The Andromeda Strain* is no more interesting than any good work of reportage.

—Dennis O'Neil
(Crichton made three earlier forays into our field by which one may attempt to assess him. As "John Norman" he wrote

Tarnsman of Gor, Outlaw of Gor, and Priest-Kings of Gor for Ballantine Books. He has also written mystery novels under the pseudonym of "John Lange," the name in which the Gor books are copyrighted. —TW)

Michael Moorcock: *THE BLACK CORRIDOR*. Ace Books #06530, New York, 1969. 187 pages, paper, 75¢.

One imagines Moorcock, editorial doyen of the New Wave as Ballard is its creative dean, viewing the film *2001: A Space Odyssey* with its narcotic pacing, its psychedelic trip and its New Wavelike enigmatic disconnected denouement, bustling to pick up Clarke's novelization of the film, hastening to devour the book only to be left desolated by its flatness, its drabness, its disheartening rationalization of the film's mystical climax. Moorcock sits in his London easy chair, mulling depressedly; suddenly inspiration arrives: he will novelize *2001* and he will do it justice.

The Black Corridor is Moorcock's *2001*, and while I have it (to my utter astonishment) that Moorcock disliked the film, it cannot be denied that large dollops of the book, Moorcock's book, have to have been inspired by *2001*. The Black Monolith theme and the lunar sequence of the earlier work are omitted; Moorcock's book opens with the long journey under way, and while Moorcock substitutes interstellar for interplanetary travel the effect is identical, including even the transmission back to earth of ship's log entries, which incidentally makes no sense whatever in the circumstances Moorcock depicts. But this is hardly more than a nit, and is worth mentioning only because it damages the story's verisimilitude. Indeed, the major weaknesses of *The Black Corridor* arise chiefly from the fact that important

elements in the plot are too far-fetched for easy acceptance in what is, basically, a tightly-woven and realistic story.

Moorcock flashes alternately between the interstellar craft with its lone custodian spaceman, its quasi-intelligent computer (not quite a Hal) and its dozen deep-sleeping passengers—and the earth in the period leading up to the departure of the expedition.

The earth we see is logically extrapolated from present conditions, with an increasing division along lines of nationalism, sectionalism, racialism clearly drawn from the myriad separatisms that already fill the media. Moorcock's lone spaceman, Ryan, soliloquizes:

"The rot had set in before my day. H-bombs, nuclear radiation, chemical poisoning, insufficient birth control, mismanaged economics, misguided political theories. And then—panic.

"And no room for error. Throw a wrench in the works of a society as sophisticated and highly tuned as ours was and—that's it. Chaos."

Moorcock's picture of the socially disintegrating earth is frighteningly convincing. The portrayal, in alternating scenes, of the disintegrating personality of Ryan is also well done. In these aspects *The Black Corridor* is a considerable success.

Unfortunately, while the background and characterization of the book are convincing, a number of crucial plot incidents are not. The hand of the author is too often too clearly visible. The reader too often finds himself answering the question "Why did that happen?" with "Mike Moorcock wanted it to happen."

For this reason primarily, *The Black Corridor* must be rated a very good attempt to achieve a very serious goal—but not a successful one. By this I am *not* advising readers to avoid it. The book has more

substance and more value than a dozen volumes of the substanceless pap ground out by too many practitioners in our field today. Moorcock has himself filled a considerable shelf with his Elric, his Dorian Hawkmoon, and his "E.P. Bradbury" adventures. And I suppose these are not to be despised as light entertainment, but they compare to books like *The Black Corridor* or Moorcock's earlier *The Final Programme* as the better bubble gum music available on AM radio stations compares to the serious modern music available on a few FM stations, on LP records, or in concert halls like the Fillmores East and West.

Even though *The Black Corridor* doesn't quite make it, it was certainly a worthwhile effort on Moorcock's part, and will be equally worthwhile for serious readers of science fiction. And we can all look forward to Moorcock's next serious novel with high anticipation.

—Richard Lupoff

R.A. Lafferty: **FOURTH MANSIONS.** Ace Special, New York, 1969. 252 pp., paper, 75¢.

R.A. Lafferty's new Ace Special is a longer and better book than his Nebula and Hugo nominee of last year, *Past Master*. It is technically a fantasy, I think—that is, Lafferty treats our world as a ball being squabbled over by monsters without any attempt at explanation, but it shouldn't matter to anyone but those few who like their monsters scientific. The setting is nominally a near tomorrow, but actually the familiar American neverland of *Unknown*, A.E. van Vogt and *The Circus of Dr. Lao*.

Lafferty's *Fourth Mansions* is as much like Lafferty's *Past Master* as any Phil Dick novel is like any other Phil Dick novel. It has the same ethical concerns, the same color, the same strange humor, and the

same wild elaborations. It also has the same characters-without-character, the same Irish obliqueness in every speech, the same ambiguity-without-subtlety, and the same curious detachment. It seems to be the special and limited way that Lafferty writes and has to be accepted as that, even though it means that Lafferty ultimately runs the risk of being a bore, just as does Dick. And as some Dick novels are better than others, *Fourth Mansions* is better and more cohesive Lafferty than we have previously seen.

It's a wild book full of prodigious lies, and I'll probably read it again.

—Alexei Panshin

Harry Harrison: **CAPTIVE UNIVERSE.** Putnam, New York, 1969. 185 pp., hardbound, \$4.50 (also: Berkeley Books, paper, 60¢).

Richard Delap gave this book a favorable review last issue; here Hank Stine offers a dissenting view. —TW

This book is a crime. If it is as common a crime as the smoking of marijuana, it is no matter: the offense is the same. That it was committed by an author of the status of Harry Harrison, only compounds the crime. There was simply no reason for this book to have been written and no reason to read it.

With only minor changes in the scientific props holding up the scenery *Captive Universe* could have been written twenty years ago. The real pity (and crime) is that it was written twenty-years ago. And nineteen ... and eighteen ... and seventeen ... and, in fact, at least once a year since then. It is a scene by scene overlay of two plots which have been used as often together as apart, neither of them changed in any way for the last two decades.

A young man, in a rigid society held in unquestioning control by an intolerant

religious system, questions the system and is sentenced to death. There is supposed to be no way out of the land where he lives, but in desperation he finds one and learns the real truth about the religion and his heritage. Or: A gigantic spaceship on a sub-light voyage to Proxima Centauri carries two societies. One very primitive and ruled by myth; the other knows where the ship is going and watches over the first as gods. The hero comes from the primitive tribe and is forced to journey until he discovers the truth.

You takes your choice. There is nothing new in this, nothing exciting, nothing daring or original or imaginative, nothing but a contrived hackwork on a theme borrowed from writers who borrowed from writers who....

The late Tony Boucher once said that while there is some excuse for a merely competent mystery or western, there is none for a merely competent sf novel. That is precisely what this book is, merely competent: pedestrian. *Captive Universe* is absolutely devoid of any genuine ideas or interest. With the possible exception of the author's need to make a living, there is no justification for this book being written. Even so, it would seem as easy to write competent category fiction in any other field as in that of science fiction. The readers in those fields do not pretend to an interest in the new and the imaginative.

Author Harrison has, with each new book, worked himself farther and farther from the originality and taste he exhibited in *Deathworld*; and farther into that cloistered circle of science fiction writers who perform their groundwork and research, not in the exacting field of reality, but in the mouldering pages of antiquity. That dogmatized clique who produce nothing that has not already been proven and tested time and time again.

This is not to say that the book is not well written. Each and every paragraph is technically perfect. Harrison has been writing too long not to know how to write a good, servicable sentence. The first scene is the best piece of action writing to be found outside Laumer. But when sentence is piled on sentence and the whole judged, what emerges is something as bland and insipid as potato pancakes and far less nourishing..

In a time when the *genre* is reaching an excellence undreamt of in its past, such work as this only looks pathetic. The potentialities of science fiction overshadow it.

—Hank Stine

Josephine Saxton: *THE HIEROS GAMOS OF SAM AND AN SMITH*. Doubleday, New York, 1969. 138 pp, hardbound, \$4.50.

Mrs. Saxton's first novel, an expanded and rewritten version of her story "The Consciousness Machine" (*Fantasy and Science Fiction*, June 1968), suffers not only in comparison to the first story but from the fact that its totality lessens the effects of its individual parts. In discarding the concept used in the shorter version—an emblematic fantasy of the subconscious recorded pictorially by a machine used in psychoanalysis—the author has left her tale stranded in a hazy, directionless waste, discarding all the original sf elements in favor of unnecessarily extended feminine symbolism.

The story follows a young (14) boy's wanderings across a seemingly deserted landscape of empty countryside and empty towns. He rescues a baby girl whose mother has just died in childbirth, and eventually sets up housekeeping (of a most disorganized sort) in an abandoned but well-stocked department store in the town

of Thingy. As the years pass, the two name themselves George and Beryl, and, though always together, separately reach their respective versions of maturity. Their adventures are simply episodes of discovery, both of themselves and of their surroundings. Mysterious strangers sometimes make appearances, but always at a distance, "offstage," never with personal contact. At times, guides are left; telegrams (implied) with such messages (direct) as CONGRATULATIONS STOP DON'T LOSE IT STOP VERY PRECIOUS STOP, or, scattered graffiti (direct) with such messages (implied) as PUSSY FOR GOD.

And then the day comes when sexuality is no longer only puzzling drawings scribbled long ago on toilet walls, but a force that is visible with Beryl's first menstrual flow. The time has come when the two step into a new world of responsibility. They re-name themselves Sam (for Samson, "Man of the Sun") and An (for Anastasia "of the Resurrection" Alma "nourishing and cherishing"). A mysterious urge carries them through copulation, the birth of a child (at the same place where Beryl was born, beside her mother's still-present bones), and the 'tidying up' of the trash of their maturing. Together, they catch a passing bus and return home to the suburbs with their baby, Miriam.

The author has deemed it necessary to include such items as a laughing mannekin which prompts George to choose his reaction—pray not to be laughed at, curse, or "simply pretend that nothing has happened"—and a chained bird which

speaks out, "Time is the Unique Subjective." In fact, the entire book is sprinkled with what are obviously Saxton's very subjective ideas of what forms maturity in the human male and female. Sometimes she is convincing, like the moment when George's anger with the baby is calmed by the child's "non-aggression," but as often Saxton's ideas of what seem to be the 'instinctive' part of Man's nature come across too strongly as simply Saxton's idea(1)s. The *Hieros Gamos* is translated (in the short version) as "heavenly marriage," but *symbolical* marriage comes out, if not the better translation of the Greek root, the less disturbing translation of the book's viewpoint.

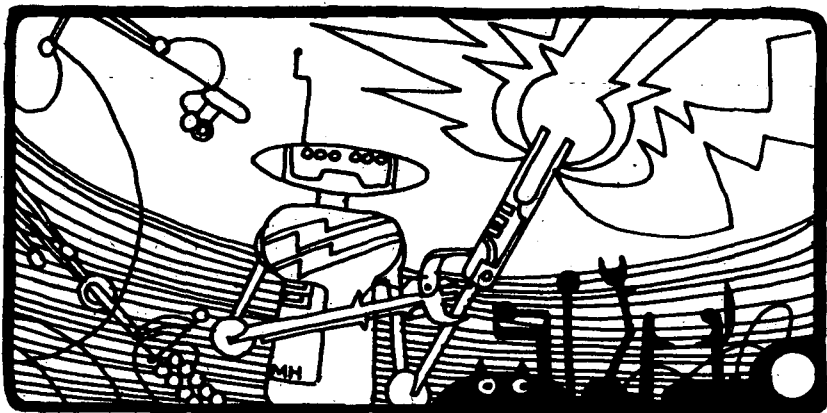
All this is not to say that Mrs. Saxton is a bad writer; to the contrary, she is very good at keeping her story in motion despite the sometimes cockeyed reasoning behind it. The fantasy-landscape of introspective characters against a necessarily lifeless backdrop becomes (for a time) real to the reader. The restlessness, the fear of and fascination with the new and unknown, the emotions of laughter and tears that come and go with insoluble moods—all this catches and holds the reader's interest and drives him on to discover what will, what *must*, happen to innocent George and Beryl, who grow up to be Sam and An, who act out the author's idea of the perfect wedding night.

It's an interesting dream of subjective impossibilities; too bad it is so offensive as a book.

—Richard Delap

NOW ON SALE IN THE FEB. FANTASTIC

Now on sale in the Feb. Fantastic Robert Bloch—Double Whammy Piers Anthony—Novel—Hasan David R. Bunch—Learning At Miss Rejoyy's Dean Koontz—The Goodship Look Out World



...Or So You Say

Letters intended for publication should be addressed to Or So You Say, c/o P.O. Box 73, Brooklyn, N.Y., 11232.

Dear Sir:

Comprehensively AMAZING STORIES should have articles from the Astronauts ... from some at 'Space Command ... also some from various universities here and abroad.

You should publish science articles on air pollution ... on water pollution ... on new equipment science has built to make some changes...

Likewise in the medical field ... where so many new innovations have come from the laboratories...

Can you get same done ... fast and soon?

Jedok Maras
Bedford, Ohio

In a word: No. —TW

Dear Ted:

The Benford & Book column on locating planets in a strange solar system overlooks the very simple method described years ago by George O. Smith and other authors. The exploring ship should drive past (not

directly toward) the system with cameras making very long time exposures. The fixed stars would photograph as points, but the planets would make streaks as they appeared to move across the background of the stars, due to the ship's motion. If the ship made two passes in different (but not opposite) directions, it should be fairly simple to triangulate on the streaks and locate every planet quite precisely. In fact, two photos taken from widely separated points ought to give a good stereoscopic view of the system. To be sure, Benford and Book specified a ship coming in at slow speed, but there doesn't seem to be any good reason for this limitation except to preclude the Smith method. Or are they planning to cover it in next issue's column?

George W. Price
1439 W. North Shore Ave.
Chicago, Illinois, 60626

Fritz Leiber brought up about the same point at the St. Louiscon, where Greg Benford explained what was wrong with it. I should let Greg answer this (perhaps next issue), but as I understand it, we are dealing with several factors. One is the visibility of a

system's planets when viewed from any appreciable distance (and also considering angle of approach—on the plane of ecliptic or perpendicular to it). Another is the necessary speed of any ship. The faster that speed, the more energy required for that second pass, since that requires changing or reversing direction. (The problem involved is touched on by Johnstone in his "Breaking Point" this issue.) And, since time is a factor (unless two ships are used for simultaneous photographing), you won't get a truly "stereoscopic" view of the system. (Okay, Greg, what did I leave out?) —TW

Dear Ted:

That you have, in so few months, succeeded in turning AMAZING into a respectable science fiction magazine is, in the face of your predecessors' failure, a remarkable feat which must always stand to your credit. That, at the same time, you have begun to publish a kind of fiction which, from the first, was more mature and exciting than your competitors', is truly astonishing.

Should AMAZING fail, it will prove, not that you are not an excellent and visionary editor, but that magazine science fiction is itself doomed to extinction:

"Up The Line," even condensed, was a masterstroke of selection. It so perfectly prepares the way for Phil Dick's novel as to seem a deliberate plan. After all, Silverberg's book was a sort of borderline-normal sf story, even if containing all sorts of diverting and enlightening elements. But it left the average AMAZING reader, perhaps even the average sf reader, with the feeling that something exciting was happening to his favorite form of literature. ("Up The Line" was not "condensed;" it was edited somewhat by Silverberg, at his own suggestion, to his own standards. Some of the more explicit sex was deleted in that editing, but not, I think, to the detriment of

the novel. I did no further editing or "condensing," and I doubt more than five hundred words were lost. —TW)

"A. Lincoln, Simulacrum" drops that change right in his lap. Without that preparation, a lot of readers would undoubtedly have felt a little overwhelmed. In fact, I cannot remember when the last Dick novel was serialized in a sf magazine. And I do know that there have been damn few, considering his popularity in hard and soft cover editions. But many magazine editors seem to feel that he is a little too advanced for their readers, who they apparently envision as fifteen-year-olds with limited mentalities and puritanical mothers. I am glad to see that you have a greater respect, not only for that fifteen-year-old (fifteen-year-old sf readers are generally far more advanced than editors think: I was reading adult Heinlein then) (So was I. —TW), but for your other readers as well.

And thank you. Your review of *Season of the Witch* (September, 1969) was the best one I got. All the others were unqualified praise. Yours was the only one that offered me insight into what I needed to do to make it better. True, I had seen some of the faults, myself. But to find a review that helps you learn how to write better... When I rewrite it, as I plan to in a few years, for a wider circulation publication, I will be guided much by that review.

Hank Stine
1416 D 9th St.
Berkeley, California

Dear Ted,

John J. Pierce talks about "the insignificance premise" that he defines as "the idea that the universe is unknowable and life is meaningless." His assumption is that the New Wave is introducing the "insignificance premise" into science fiction.

OR SO YOU SAY

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I think that stories interpretable as being based on the "insignificance premise" have existed in the science fiction field as long as there has *been* a science fiction field.

There were, in the early AMAZINGS and other early magazines, the sort of story Leland Sapiro calls the "Faust" story—"There are some things Man was not meant to know." Some new discovery would run rampant and inevitably destroyed its maker in a final burst of malevolence. The universe in this type of story is always unknowable.

There have been waves of other stories of insignificance: Adam and Eve appeared over and over, the products of aborted experiments or titantic disasters (often man-made, and about to be repeated in the story); the sun exploded or the icecaps melted (in one Asimov story the suns all disappeared) destroying Earth or civilization long before J.G. Ballard; Man travelled to the stars, and time and time again found himself unable to comprehend the natives or overcome the new environment; World War III destroyed everything. Etc.

A story quite chilling in its implications, is "The Cold Equations" by Tom Godwin. In this story, a pilot of an emergency interstellar rocket must eject a young female stowaway from the rocket in space in order to have the fuel to land. This is in effect murder, but in landing the pilot will bring serum that will save a good deal of the population of the planet. Human values go out the window, as they must in the situation described in the story, to be replaced by sheer numerical ones. (The equations referred to in the title are, I believe, both the fuel equations and the girl-to-population inequation.) The situation demands a murder, true; but the situation is constructed to force the conclusion. And life without human values is, to me, meaningless.

The point of this is that the "insignificance premise" seems to exist in science fiction written before the "New Wave." The stories I mentioned above are considered by many to be classics, but no one ever criticized them for John's reasons. (Have they?)

Maybe he has something else against the "New Wave"?

Jerry Kaufman
1596 ½ N. High St.
Columbus, Ohio, 43201

Dear Mr. White,

Comments on the November AMAZING:

It says in large print ALL STORIES NEW and then in tiny print "plus a famous classic." That's a lowdown sneaky thing to do! But as long as you are doing it, you might as well make the best of it and milk it for all it's worth. I just came up with this brilliant idea (which is very similar to a Brilliant Idea Mort Weissinger had for the first ish of STARTLING in 1939!). Why don't you run a Hall of Fame department which prints stories specifically requested by the readers? Then you can bill it as "A Department of Classics Printed By Popular Demand." If you do this, I would like to see Ray Bradbury's "I Rocket" reprinted from the May, 1944 issue. There was an Ed Hamilton story in the October, 1930 issue about a man from the past who was transported into the 20th century and burned at the stake when he returned to tell what he had seen. I can't recall the title, but I'd like to see this reprinted.

The artwork was fine thish—including your own drawing. I think you should get art by such leading fan artists as Tim Kirk, George Barr, Doug Lovenstein, Mike Gilbert, Derek Carter, Bill Brown, and then there's this guy named Jack Gaughan who keeps turning up in the fanzines...

Is it possible for you to get a Chesley Bonestell cover?

Editorial: As an older fan told me a while back, we shouldn't moan about the poor sales of SF magazines; we should be thanking the Fates that they have survived at all when all the other types have died almost completely. SF magazines lead the field of all-fiction magazines by sheer numbers alone. There are more SF magazines than all of the westerns and mysteries put together.

Perhaps sales would go up if SF outfits started to merge. Suppose AMAZING and FANTASTIC merged with GALAXY and its companions, etc.? Wouldn't this help distribution? Oh well, this is idle dreaming. I suppose legal complications would make this impossible.

Some magazines have done worse than you are. Sam Moskowitz said in *Seekers of Tomorrow* that *WEIRD TALES* never did better than about 25 thousand readers per issue.

Darrell Schweitzer
113 Deepdale Rd.
Pa., 19087

We'd have no objection to using several of the fan artists you mention—if they only lived closer at hand. We work against tight deadlines, often giving our artists a minimum of time. The delay in mailing stories cross-country and mailing the artwork back in time makes west-coast based artists unavailable to us. As for that Gaughan fellow, he seems pretty busy on the job of art director over at GALAXY and IF, but if he'd like to do a little moonlighting ... how about it, Jack?

Merging the remaining sf magazines would be like putting all our eggs in one basket: not too sensible. Nor would it probably be of any financial benefit. The more magazines there are, the healthier the field is, since it broadens market penetration and creates more outlets for writers, and thus greater incentive to come into or remain in our field. Start merging

publishers, and you'll find the titles merging too—which would be just another form of collapse for the field.

I doubt if WEIRD TALES ever made much money, but as long as it was part of a pulp chain that did, it was safe. When the chain went under, so did WT. That is the real tragedy of the death of the pulps.
—TW

Dear Mr. White:

The November AMAZING is a groove. Wild stories, beautiful departments, a real rapping editorial—well worth the extra dime.

The first installment of the Philip K. Dick novel was a trip! I can't wait to read the conclusion. Dick must be stoned out of his mind—on talent!

And Ray Russell, *Playboy's* superstar, came through with a mind-blower in "A Whole New Ball Game." Russell's theme has been treated before by Larry Niven, but not with this kind of compression and conciseness, and certainly not with such freaked-out horror impact. Russell has got to be one of the heaviest heads on the scene today. And versatile—he goes from the baroque style of his "Sardonicus" to the hyper-hip mod-mod-mainstream of his novel, *The Colony*, to the blood-curdling sub-moronic illiteracy of "Ball Game." He's got to be at least three people, a kind of "Unholy Trinity" (to borrow the title of one of his books). Let's have more of him, please, plus Panshin, Dick, and how about Ron Goulart?

I put down just two things in the Nov. issue. One is the microscopic size of the type. The other is your stated opinion that the term "sci-fi" is contemptuous and "stands for the know-nothing attitude toward science fiction." Sure, "sci-fi" is a spin-off of "hi-fi," but why get uptight about that? It's a handy, euphonious phrase that's less ponderous than "science fiction"

and sounds more groovy than "s-f". It's used with affection, not contempt. How do other readers feel?

Lloyd C. Davioni
Chicago, Illinois, 60618

You're not jiving me, are you, Lloyd? —TW

Dear Mr. White:

In the review of *The Caves of Karst* (a good novel) you mentioned that Lester del Rey wrote "Police Your Planet." I have the issues of *SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURES* from 1953 with the first, third and fourth parts of that novel and it's by Erik Van Lihn, unless that's a pseudonym for Lester del Rey.

Stephen Darner
294 B Hollywood Ave.
Bronx, N.Y., 10465

It is. —TW

Editor:

If there is something worse than an argument that is merely irrational, it is an argument that is a bromide, a catch-phrase, a ritual exorcism of an unpopular concept—exorcised, not by factual evidence, but *by routine*. Mr. Pierce's bromides in the September *AMAZING STORIES* letter column are worse than those of the fiction he admires.

"New Thing writing has nothing whatsoever to do with style, but it has everything to do with content." That statement cannot be supported with factual evidence—and, significantly enough, Mr. Pierce has neglected to do so. Ray Bradbury's stylistic achievement—an achievement that defied the canons of the genre, and that earned him an audience of millions—is unprecedented . . . and unmistakable; Samuel Delany, who put music to paper stylistically, as well as thematically, with *The Einstein Intersection*, has taken it from there. Vonnegut's vitriol has demonstrated the primacy of style in

satire—and it is his contribution to the New Wave. All of them, whatever their particular errors or inconsistencies—Ellison, Ballard, Disch, Lafferty, et al—share a single common characteristic concerning their respective styles: the fact that they are *distinctive*. The style of a pen reveals the style of a life: every word an author puts to paper is a psychological confession—or a psychological affirmation—whether it is intended or not. It is an author's style, more than any other single factor, that demonstrates the nature of his psychology, of his frame-of-reference, of his view of existence. To say that the New Wave—or *any* literary movement—has "nothing whatsoever to do with style" is an absurd error. The single most important fact concerning the New Wave is that they do not follow stylistic formulas, they do not perform genre rituals—they are guilty of *good writing*—because they realize the grotesque irrationality of following a form, not because it is valid, but because it is *old*. They are not figures in a Wax Museum—they are individuals: their work is not the end product of the collective mistakes of their literary ancestors, it is the sum total of their individual effort.

"The basis of the 'New Thing' is ... the idea that the universe is unknowable and life is meaningless." That, Mr. Pierce, is precisely what the New Wave is *not*. Traditionalist authors gave their characters blond hair, square jaws, blue eyes, magic swords, and WASPy names ... and called them "heroes". They gave their stories "happy" endings—with no explanation other than the fact that someone's ray gun was bigger and gaudier than somebody else's. They didn't bother with style ... for 1¢ a word, why bother with such niceties?

The New Wave is a revolt against the unearned, in matter, in spirit, and in literature. Heroes do *not* require magic swords—they can, and do, exist in real life.

It is not enough to stand there and pose, or sit there and push buttons—a character must act on his ideals and convictions in the events of the story. Man *can* perceive and deal with the facts of reality: however, he can not do so automatically. Values (i.e. that which gives life its meaning, Mr. Pierce) have to be earned, not with magic swords and Flash Gordon paraphernalia, but with a *moral philosophy*. Speculative fiction is (properly) no longer primarily concerned with the projection of technology, as such: it is concerned with a much wider area ... the projection of *Man*. The issue is no longer merely science: it is now the science of ethics. Traditionally, sf authors have kept their characters too busy fighting BEMS from Betelgeuse to bother with such mundane issues as morality and philosophy. In the context of traditional science fiction, the question of whether or not the universe is unknowable or life is meaningless is irrelevant—because these are questions traditionalists did not care—or dare—to confront explicitly. The New Wave is important because it is primarily concerned with the central issue of literature (and of life): the issue of good and evil, the realm of values, the world of *man*. The New Wave is *man-centered*: it is concerned with the essentials of his existence, with *this earth*, with reality. The New Wave asserts that life is meaningless? They, almost alone, in and out of the genre, are the only literary movement that deals with life—with morality, and with Man. This is the first stage of a trend that Norman Spinrad's *Bug Jack Barron* has brought to a climax: the birth of a genuine Romantic movement in speculative fiction.

Mr. Pierce is referring to an inconsistent minority of New Wave writers, with his usual method of making illogical intellectual "package" deals: and, as such, is paying the New Wave the greatest compliment any movement of its kind can

receive from its enemies: he is—instead of defining and denouncing its actual precepts—attacking a straw-man. If Mr. Pierce wishes to address himself to the issue honestly, and with full consistency, he will have to say: 'The New Wave is concerned with reality—with the primary elements of man's relationship to existence—and I think that this is immoral, destructive, and wrong.' Fortunately for Mr. Pierce, intellectual honesty is not one of his strong points.

The literary revolution in sf was initiated by those who challenged the counterfeit romanticism of formula fiction. It will end—successfully—when the Old Wave's claim to the mantle of romanticism is broken.

That day is not far.

Justin St. John
2760 Crescent Dr.

Yorktown, N.Y., 10598

I think I'll let you and John J. fight this one out. —TW

Dear Ted:

The fanzine review department was really great. Not many pro mags take time to review them, as I feel they should. It was all right except for the grave error about SHAGGY's printing process ... it is not multilith, but litho. Just looking at the issue one can see that it is in no way, shape or form any resemblance to multilith ... maybe that's why John was so surprised that a fanzine could get such great results from Multilith. How he made that mistake is beyond me.

Keith Tucker
14362 Lorne St.

Van Nuys, Calif., 91402

But Keith—! Multilith and litho are the same thing! Litho refers to the lithographic process which was once a hand process using flat stone for the image. When a metal (or plastic, or paper) plate or mat was

substituted for the stone and fixed on a cylinder, the multi-litho process was invented. And, since the image on these plates was not mirror-imaged, they were printed onto an offset cylinder, from which the image was transferred to the paper, hence another word for the process, "offset," or offset lithography. This magazine is printed by that process—and so is SHAGGY. The only difference is the size of machine and the speed of the run. But SHAGGY uses a multilith machine. —TW

Dear Ted:

I have not written to a science fiction magazine before but...

How's that for an opening, eh? Actually, I have written to science fiction magazines before, but I felt I needed a good opening...

It is true I haven't written to a science fiction magazine in about nine years. In fact, I don't believe I've read a science fiction magazine in about eight years—until the September issue of AMAZING.

Why now? Well, in recent months I have been thumbing through your magazines on the stands with a growing curiosity. For one thing, when I discovered you were running fanzine reviews I felt a strange pang—something akin to fear or heartburn.

In the late fifties, I wallowed in the glorious unreal world of a neofan. I subscribed to every fanzine I knew of, bought every prozine on the market and wrote letters of absurd comment to them all. I look back on those times with mixed feelings. Science fiction and fandom were undoubtedly forms of escape for me, so I now feel somewhat critical of my younger self for not being more productive in the real world around me. On the other hand, I was happy. I delighted in seeing my name in print and was delirious when a Big Name Fan would make some comment on a letter of mine.

But my brief neofannish life slowly burned out for two reasons. My aunt, who I lived with, would not allow me to move into our new house unless I got rid of my thousands of old books and magazines. One warm night, I made a heroic gesture of defiance. A friend and I loaded all those books into his car and delivered a science fiction book or magazine to almost every house in Hialeah. It made the papers but without the support of those cartons of musty books around me, I slowly withdrew into the everyday world.

The other reason was a simple one—sex. Somebody told me I should try it sometime. "Nah," I said. "It wouldn't be as interesting as a new novel by Robert Heinlein." Would all due respect to Heinlein, I found out I was wrong.

So anyway (you still with me, Ted?), I dropped out. I have continued to buy about four to 10 pocketbooks a month, but no magazines at all. Probably a reactionary swing from one extreme to the other or something like that.

But, as I said, lately I found myself thumbing through AMAZING and FANTASTIC on the stands. That can be embarrassing you know. Usually, there is a pimply-faced kid on my right pawing *Teenage Nudist* and breathing harshly. On my left is a well-dressed middle-aged gentleman working his way through *Whips and Boots* or maybe *Big Mommas*, while breathing harshly.

They both turn and look at me—caressing the pages of AMAZING and breathing harshly—I have hayfever. The well-dressed man grabs the pimply-faced kid and says, "Come on, son, I don't want you around weirdos like that."

Where was I?

Oh yes. I finally did it. I bought the September AMAZING and took it home wrapped in a copy of *Playboy*. My wife saw

the AMAZING and started to cry softly—my aunt had warned her about my past.

“It’s just one, honey,” I said. “Don’t worry. I can stop whenever I want to.”

Jerry Greene
974 Miracle Way
Rockledge, Florida

Dear Ted,

Concerning the *very* important issues brought out in Bob Tucker’s letter: I am in agreement with his first and third points—and in total disagreement with his second. To think that an s-f mag would so drastically limit artistic freedom ... to not allow your cover artists to depict a red and yellow sky! This is surely just a bad joke on Mr. Tucker’s part. I cannot believe that this is true.

Michael Juergens
257 Florence St.
Hammond, Indiana, 46324

Bob Tucker’s letter may indeed have plunged all Fandom into war! —TW

And that wraps it up for another issue. I want to remind you (if you missed my mention in the editorial) that from now on all comments on stories and authors will be forwarded directly to them if not published here. This is your opportunity to engage in total Reader Feedback, because you can be sure your comments, criticisms or praise will reach the authors in question. (But please don’t demand answers to questions or expect to enter into direct correspondence with your favorite authors as a result of this service; writers are busy people who spend most of their time at the typewriter on their stories, and it would be unfair to make additional demands upon them, particularly if you’re looking forward to more stories from them.) All of us will be looking forward to your comments on the stories and features in *this* issue.

—Ted White

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION (Act of October 23, 1962; Section 4369, Title 39, United States Code).

1. Date of Filing: October 1, 1969
2. Title of Publication: Amazing Stories
3. Frequency of Issue: Bi-Monthly
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8. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages or Other Securities: None
10. EXTENT AND NATURE OF CIRCULATION

	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	Single Issue Nearest To Filing Date
A. Total No. Copies Printed (Net Press Run)	93,634	84,335
B. Paid Circulation		
1. Sales through Dealers and Carriers, street vendors and counter sales	33,449	33,600
2. Mail Subscriptions	1,342	1,200
C. Total Paid Circulation	34,791	34,800
D. Free Distribution (including samples) by Mail, Carrier or other means	160	135
E. Total Distribution (Sum of C and D)	34,951	34,935
F. Office Use, Left-Over, Unaccounted, Spoiled After Printing	58,683	49,400
G. Total (Sum of E & F should equal net press run shown in A)	93,634	84,335

I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.

Sol Cohen, Publisher

(no easy task, I assure you), I had an easier time of it at least getting editors to *read* my stuff. But each submission was a grinding sort of thing: I knew the odds were in favor of a string of rejections before I made my sale. And even after I had begun to find editors who would buy my work consistently, my output was greater (or potentially greater) than they alone could handle.

The first plateau for a professional writer is to make consistent sales. The second is to be solicited by publishers in advance of a submission.

Some time in early 1967, the editor at Paperback Library solicited a book from me. The company was not among those with prestige—it published mostly hack space-operas during that period—and I had never had any dealings with it. But the editor there wanted to upgrade his line, my agent said, and was offering money equal to that being paid by better houses.

Upgrading the line, I said. And they'd like a book from me . . .

Set on Earth, sometime in the not-too-distant future, my agent said.

I just saw this television program, I said . . .

So do an outline, my agent said, and we'll see how they like it.

By this point, you see, it was no longer necessary for me to even write the first chapter. An outline would suffice. I felt pretty good about that. I sat down and wrote a detailed outline of a book I called *By Furies Possessed*. I liked the title: it had class. In the outline I laid out the book I'd conceived in reply to that TV show. *That ought to upgrade their line*.

But Paperback Library didn't agree with me. The book wasn't exactly what they were looking for. What *were* they looking for? Well, Ace Books had the best-selling line of

sf, and the idea seemed to be to model the new policy along similar lines . . .

So *By Furies Possessed*, classy title and all, went into the file drawer, and I spent a hard twenty minutes on a new outline. It was a sequel to my first solo novel, which by no coincidence at all had been an Ace Book. I briefly outlined the opening situation and its resolution, and suggested there would be a lot of movement in the middle. It was set on Earth, and in the not-too-distant future. Then I wracked my brains for a suitable title, evocative of all I thought the editor at Paperback Library really wanted. It had to have elan; it needed verve and pace and excitement. It had to have zip, if you know what I mean, Meyer. I finally arrived at *Spawn of the Death Machine*.

The editor bought it immediately.

So here was this long, thoughtful outline and a classy title for a book that hadn't been wanted. A book I wanted to write, but refused to write without a contract from a publisher.

And then the farce began.

It began with the decision of Hearst Inc. to start a new line of paperback books, entirely separate from its long-established Avon line. Separate offices, separate editorial staff, separate distribution. I'd submitted an earlier book-outline to the editor of the new line, Banner Books. He'd bought it.

Now the editor of Avon, restimulating Avon's sf program, solicited me for a book. Avon, I thought, would appreciate a classy book. I took the outline for *By Furies Possessed* from my files and sent it over. Avon, I decided, would be a better home for the book in any case.

Avon never got a look at it.

When Banner had been set up, an agreement had been reached with Avon: neither would raid the other's authors. No

doubt this agreement had been engineered at Avon, since Banner hardly *had* any authors to begin with. But, after they'd purchased my book, they had me. That made *me* a Banner author. And that meant that anything I submitted to Avon had to go first to Banner, for a first-look and first-refusal. No matter that Avon hadn't known about my Banner sale when they asked to see a book from me; I was a Banner author, and so *By Furies Possessed* went to Banner.

Banner bought it.

What's that you say? You've never *seen* a Banner book? You're far from alone. The one published Banner book for which I've seen sales figures sold less than 15,000 copies—abysmally bad for the paperback market. It wasn't Banner's fault, precisely; the distributors hadn't really wanted to handle a brand-new line of books, and they had resisted pretty successfully. Banner was officially folded in the fall of 1967.

The news reached me before I had begun to write my two contracted-for books, and it did not entirely depress me, since my agent said he felt he could resell the books at a better price in the escalating market. (Those Banner books which weren't resold were inherited by Avon, a not unhappy fate, but in the process they glutted the Avon inventory and schedule considerably. Avon was pleased to see many of them go elsewhere.)

To cut this recitation short, I shall say that in the summer of 1968, after my somewhat tattered outline of the book had met with rejection elsewhere, Signet Books asked to see it, and, having seen it, bought it, for a handsome price.

And at this point it fell due for me to *write* the book. For you can merrily *sell*, oh, dozens of outlines for books, but each contract specifies a date for delivery, and pre-selling a book does not wipe out the

time-consuming necessity of sitting down before the typewriter for hours each day, writing each and every one of those several-hundred manuscript pages.

Time had passed. Years, in fact. Other books had been written in the interim. (*Spawn of the Death Machine* had come out with a sword-and-sorcery package, the victim of yet a newer policy, my name not even on its spine, and seemed to sink like a stone from sight. People tell me they've found it and read it, but not many . . .) The original television show that had aroused my ire was dim in my memory, and relegated to reruns on Channel Nine. But perhaps all this was just as well, since my style had also undergone an evolution and I was itching to tackle a novel with substance to it. I had a first-rate publisher, and the ambition to make it one of which they—and I—could be really proud.

I wrote the book in the early spring of 1969, while learning how to put together this magazine. I did my editorial work during the day, and wrote—averaging a chapter each night—after midnight. It turned out to be 75,000 words long—my longest book to date—and when I proofed the clean copy from the typist, I decided I was indeed proud of it.

It seems to me that it takes a certain amount of gall for any editor to publish his own fiction, and that for him to justify himself that fiction has got to be better than the average of what he buys from others. But of course an editor can't help being a biased judge of that: a more objective decision is needed. In this case, I'll rely upon yours. I'm not going to offer any more justification than my own pride in the novel. If you think it deserves to follow the novels of Bob Silverberg and Phil Dick, then I shall consider the case closed. And if you don't—

Well, I expect I'll be hearing about it.

Last issue we added a new name to our masthead, although too late for me to comment on the event. Arnold Katz—better known as plain old Arnie Katz—has been one of the better-known fans for most of this last decade, and his fanzine, QUIP, one of the best fanzines. As Associate Editor, he will relieve me of the task of pouring through all those smouldering old issues of AMAZING STORIES, in search of suitable reprints for our Classic. And, not to put too fine a point on it, he will also probably do a better job. If nothing else, his presence will allow me to pass the buck on any future complaints in that department.

We've also instituted a new service for our authors. I've borrowed it from the practice of several fanzine editors, and I call it Reader Feedback.

Since we've restored the reader departments to AMAZING, we've received a huge influx of mail. Frankly, that pleases me. I love to receive mail, and nothing delights me more than letters on each issue of this magazine.

But the present volume of mail is considerably greater than we have space to print. I try to select those letters I think best for publication here, but I'm forced to pass over many which offer insightful comments on the stories we've published. My solution to the problem posed by these remaining letters is to pass them on directly to the authors they discuss. When a letter comments on more than one story, I clip it apart and each part goes with the others destined for that author. In this way the authors have a chance for genuine feedback on their work—something almost all are grateful for—and you can count on it that even if your letter doesn't make it into print, it will reach the eyes of your favorite (or

less-than-favorite) authors.

As I say, this is not an original idea with me. However, I believe AMAZING (and FANTASTIC, also) will be the first professional sf magazine to put it into practice.

So keep those cards and letters pouring in, folks; they'll be read and re-read by all concerned.

A continuing complaint in many letters is the quality of our covers. I've explained the situation before, but I can now add that I have contacted several promising young artists whose works I saw at the World SF Convention in St. Louis (a fine convention, by the way, and a credit to its whole Committee!), and you will be seeing their work on upcoming covers.

In the meantime, we are still sifting the covers offered to us from Europe, and having new stories written around them whenever possible. One such cover-story was Greg Benford's "Sons of Man," in our November issue. Another is this issue's "Breaking Point."

William Johnstone is a writer new to sf and these pages, but he's somewhat better known in Hollywood, where he has accumulated numerous TV and screen credits. He originally queried us about a novel he wanted to write, and the cover-story commission grew out of this. "Breaking Point" is actually the opening story in a projected book-length series. You'll be reading the rest of the stories here as fast as they're written and we can publish them. And before they're finished, I'm willing to bet a book publisher will have snapped them up.

—Ted White





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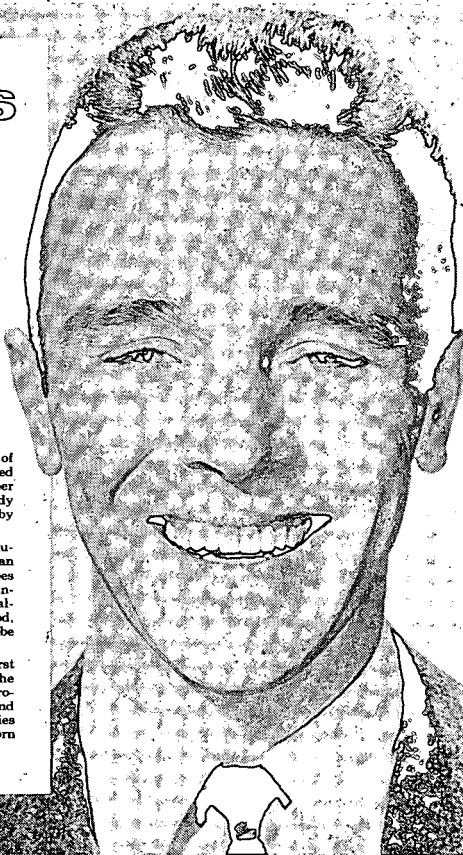
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